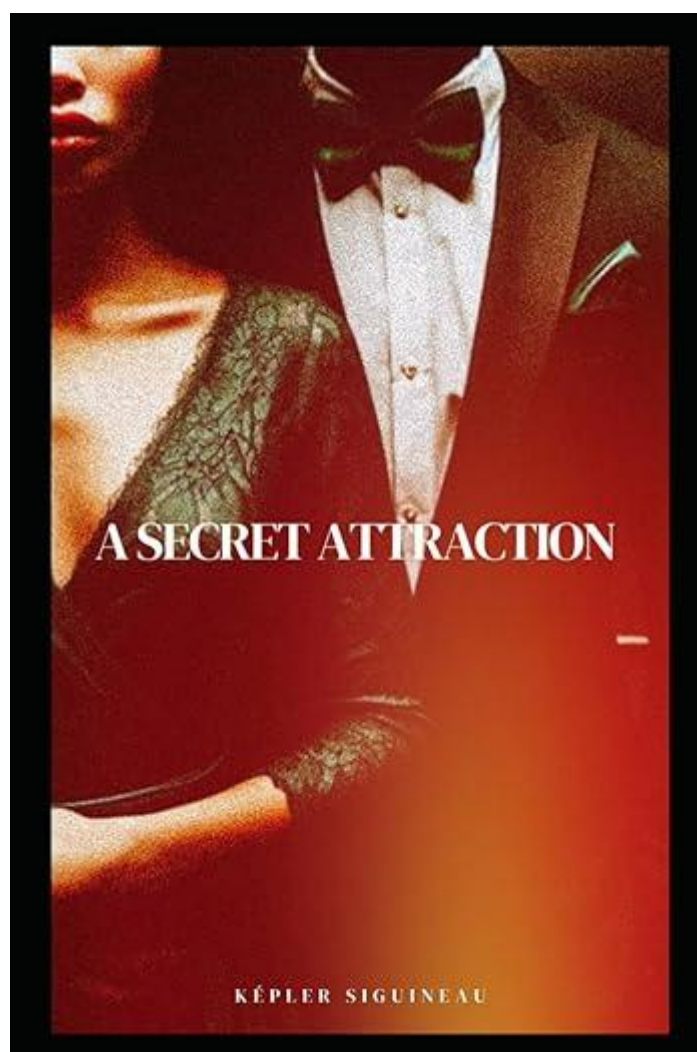


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“A Secret Attraction Between Mentor And Mentee”



A Secret Attraction

A Secret Attraction

Between Mentor and Mentee

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Chapter 1

Attraction At First Sight

[NYC, 8 P.M.]

In the office of Michael Katz, the young CEO of New York's latest tech startup, "**Tech & Tech**", we find two men standing over a round table in the dark, staring at a laptop screen.

The two men are Michael himself and his co-founder and best friend, Chris. They are reviewing this year's winner of the WEM (Women in Entrepreneurship Mentorship) program.

Why are two men leading WEM? As Michael climbed the ladder of success, he faced many trials and tribulations—both internal and external battles. One of those battles was being Black in America. After reaching a certain level of success, he stopped to look around. He saw other Black people—though

few, they were there, thriving in the pool of financial success in America. Within that pool of Black excellence, there were nearly no women. Women who reminded him of his mother—a single mother who worked hard to provide for her children, yet lacked the knowledge, mindset, or environment to succeed.

Michael knew that when he made it, he had to help. Four years ago, after their company hit \$1M in ARR (Annual Recurring Revenue), they launched WEM.

In the four years since its inception, WEM has helped four Black women go from earning as little as \$20,000 a year to over \$3M annually in their businesses.

Now, with \$20M in ARR, their new goal is to grow to \$100M in the next two years. For their business to continue growing, they need a physical presence in the world—and that is exactly what they are set to do. This year, they're looking for a candidate who excels at providing an outstanding customer experience in a brick-and-mortar environment.

They were still looking for the usual qualities in a candidate—creativity, resilience, coachability. Most importantly, they needed someone who would benefit from their mentorship and, in turn, help grow “**Tech & Tech.**”

“Chris, who is this year’s winner?” Michael asked (Chris leads the WEM recruitment). “Her name is LaShana, and she is much better than all of the candidates. The second I read her submission, I knew she was the winner.”

“Okay, Chris, you’re hyping her up! Let’s hear her speech.” And just like that, Michael presses play. On the screen, he sees a woman exit the podium, followed by a beautiful woman approaching it. Once she reaches the podium, the screen displaying the speaker’s name changes.

What was once “Diane” becomes “LaShana.” The moment Michael sees the new name, he quickly pauses the video, looks at Chris, and says, “We have a problem.” Chris, confused, asks, “What’s the problem?” “She’s beautiful!”

“What?! You find her attractive? How? Why? Since when?”

“She’s exactly my type. We can’t have her join the mentorship.”

Chris was sure Michael wouldn’t be attracted to her. He didn’t think she was ugly—he just didn’t think she’d be Michael’s type. She was a tomboy, and Michael had never shown interest in tomboys before. Michael enjoyed working with women, well, only with women he didn’t find attractive. Over the years, Michael had asked Chris to interview the mentees and make sure of two things:

1. They were qualified for the mentorship.
2. Michael was not attracted to them.

Chris had always been successful at fulfilling this request. Except this time, something was different. He was confused. He thought he knew Michael’s type inside and out. Chris knew Michael had basic—and sometimes questionable—taste. Chris’s wife, Alexandra, was, in his eyes, the most beautiful woman in the world. When they first started dating, Chris wanted to show off, so he showed Michael a picture of

Alexandra and asked, “How hot is this woman?” Expecting Michael to say, “She’s a 9,” he was stunned when Michael responded with, “Like a 6?” Chris was speechless. Was his friend blind? Did he have terrible taste? He couldn’t understand it at all, so he decided to let it go.

“What did you just say? No. That would be completely stupid, unfair, and we can’t do that. We already told her that she won. We’ve also sent rejection letters to all the other candidates. She completely stood out from the others. We’re not going to lose talent just because you find this particular woman attractive. There are probably ten women more beautiful than her messaging you right now.”

Michael paused and realized that Chris was right—they couldn’t cancel the mentorship. Michael also realized that Chris had made a mistake. There were no women more beautiful than LaShana texting him... because LaShana wasn’t texting him.

Chris: “She slipped through because your attraction scale is out of whack.

Michael: “Nah, she’s beautiful. Well, since you’re going to mentor her, there’s nothing to worry about.”

Chris: “Already defending your wife’s honor, I see.” He said, laughing.

Michael: “Shut up. Can you send her the email for the LDA meeting?”

What is an LDA Meeting?

L -unch

D -inner

A -fter party

Meeting

The Lunch Dinner After Party was Chris’ invention for their mentees. It starts with a light lunch, followed by a three-hour meeting. Then there's dinner with Michael, Chris, and their mentee. The evening ends with an after-party where the mentee bonds with the team they’ll work closely with (in

LaShana's case, it's the retail store development team). This happens once a month. The goal is to provide the mentees with undivided attention, answer their questions, and help them bond with the team.

June 1st, LaShana has her first L.D.A. meeting. She's meeting with Chris, who warns her that the restaurant tends to be cold, so she might want to dress warmly. She chooses a simple, cute outfit—a white long-sleeve shirt, a light brown sweater, beige pants, a cute beige purse, and black boots. In her purse, she carries her essentials, including her success notebook. This notebook is where she writes anything and everything that could help her achieve her dreams.

She arrives at the restaurant 10 minutes early, as her motto is, "If you're on time, you're 10 minutes late." She's surprised to see that Chris is already there with a glass of water and his laptop open, working. That gives her a good first impression—he was there even earlier than she was and was already hard at work!

“Hi, Chris! It’s great seeing you again.”

“Likewise, it’s been a couple of weeks. I’m glad you didn’t run away yet. Sorry for the mess.” He gestures to the laptop on the desk, the papers sprawled across the table, his notepad, and the company pen engraved with “**Tech & Tech**” in green.

“You’re forgiven,” she replies.

That made Chris chuckle. “Ha, thank you for your kindness, your highness.” He got up from the table to shake her hand, then added, “Wow, I got to shake hands with loyalty. I’m gonna brag to my wife, though I hope she doesn’t get jealous that she didn’t get to do the same.”

“Give me a second, I’ll clean up. Well, except for this notepad—I want to take notes during our conversation. Is that okay with you?”

“Yes, that’s fine,” she replied. “As long as you let me do the same.” She pulled out her success notebook and her favorite pen from her purse. The pen was her favorite because it was the only one her dad ever used when he was working.

“Yes, please do! I love it when people take notes, too. It makes it seem like they care about what I have to say, haha.”

Chris cleared everything from the table, and now only two notepads and two pens remained between the mentor and the mentee.

“Have you ever had an ‘LDA meeting’ before?”

“No, first time.” “I thought so! It’s my invention!” The way he said that, LaShana could tell he felt proud of his idea. She knew better than to say, “The name sounds kinda stupid,” so instead, she asked, “How did you come up with it?”

He beamed at the question. “Well, eating lunch is always a great way for people to bond and have a conversation. Lunch is just between us, so we can discuss what the program entails. We’re gonna have a long lunch—let’s make it fun! It’s scheduled for three hours. After lunch, we’ll go to dinner with Michael. The point of these dinners is to do status updates with him, and he’ll share some observations and advice with both of us. He sometimes has great ideas—ideas that I could never

think of. His brain is really good at improving things. I'm still smarter than him, though. Tell him I said that."

"I will," LaShana quickly replied, making him smile. He continued, "There are things that he does better than I do. That's why we've been partners for so long and why we've been able to grow the company to what it is now. After our dinner with Michael, we'll join the team at the after party."

"Sounds fun! Is it an actual party?" she asked.

"Yes, just not a rowdy one. We rent out a bar from a friend on a slow day like today. We set up board games, video games, food, and alcohol. It's Tuesday, so it's not a busy club night unless you're into Drake."

"The party will be just us, Michael, and the team. Secret tip: Michael is super friendly when he's tipsy, so it's a great time to get to know him personally. I'm friendly whenever, wherever!"

"Roger that," she replied.

“Do you want to eat now, or do you want to eat later?” he continued. “Well, since we’re going to be here for three hours and have dinner after, let’s definitely start by eating lunch!”

“LaShana, what is your goal with your business?” Chris asked. “I want to build a lot of great value hotels and one super luxurious hotel.”

“Why do you have two different goals in the same industry? Fortunately, they wouldn’t compete with each other; they seem like completely different business models. Can you explain that to me?”

She answered:

“Well, the great value chain of hotels is to provide the best experience possible for working Americans who want to spend the weekend with their partners, away from their children, without being too far in case of an emergency. It also has to be affordable. Everything is centered around providing a fantastic, laid-back experience. We even have adult-only amenities. The luxurious hotel is about providing

the best experience possible to our guests, without cutting any corners for the sake of price. They get the best experience on the planet. The value will be reflected in the price.”

“Okay, I like those goals. Why the hotel industry?”

“Well, almost my entire family has worked in the hotel industry. My parents actually met in a hotel—my dad was a custodian, and my mom was a consultant. I’m the only one who started a business, though. That’s why I applied for the mentorship. Also, I want to learn to market and sell to the affluent crowd.”

Chris was happy to hear her motivation. It affirmed that they made the right call in picking her. “Well, we can definitely help you with business knowledge. We sell our services to CEOs, so you’ll definitely get experience there. On your application, you mentioned that you were able to keep your hotel occupancy high year-round, right?”

“Yes, our team keeps our hotel at near capacity all year. We plan to improve the process and eventually franchise it.”

“That’s fantastic. As you know, we’re opening our own retail stores soon. Your experience driving traffic will help our brick-and-mortar locations tremendously.”

“How far along are you guys with the retail locations?”

“Not very far. We don’t even have locations in mind yet. We just know we want to have stores.”

“Okay, I can definitely help with picking the right locations. There’s a science and art to it. Location isn’t the only thing that matters; we also have to make sure the interior is designed properly.”

“Well, that’s why we have you, LaShana, as our guru.”

“Ha! Okay, I’ll be the guru you guys need.” LaShana grinned.

“Chris, I have a question.”

“Go ahead, you can ask me anything.”

“Looking at your bio on the website, it says you have a child, and that your wife is pregnant. Did she give birth yet?”

“Almost! She’s actually eight months pregnant. So in less than a month, we’ll add another cute monster to our family. You don’t have to worry about it. My wife and I already had a long discussion about it. For our firstborn, Aaron, I stayed home with Jessica. Turns out, I wasn’t really needed. Our family and friends were there to support us. This time around, we’re doing things differently. I’ll continue working. You get to have me as your mentor, and don’t worry! The mentorship program is fluid. If she needs me, I can be there quickly and then get back to you.”

After several hours, the lunch part of the LDA meeting was coming to an end. “LaShana, the restaurant we’re going to is only one mile away. We can walk or take the Metro. Walking will take us about 20 minutes, and the Metro, 4. What would you prefer?”

“I prefer walking.”

LaShana thought the walk would give her more time to ask him more about Michael, and the walk was necessary to calm

her nerves. She had attended Michael's seminar, "**How to Grow Your Business with Massive Vision**," and after implementing some of the information he shared, she'd grown her business to \$24K/month. She'd also developed a small crush on him ever since. She didn't think much of it—he was just another handsome, rich guy—until she got accepted into the mentorship. As they walked, she concluded, "It's like having a crush on a professor in college. It's okay to have, you just can't act on it. After all, he's technically my teacher. He's 100% popular with women. He's tall, handsome, ambitious, super rich, and kind. Well, whatever, even if I wa—"

"We're here." Chris's voice interrupted her train of thought as he pointed to the small, unassuming restaurant in front of them.

It was a mom-and-pop shop, one that looked identical to all the small Italian restaurants in her hometown. She was surprised when she looked at the sign and didn't see Italian,

instead she saw the plain, unremarkable sign that simply read “Your Restaurant” on the door.

As soon as they walked in, the host greeted them. “You must be Chris and LaShana. Michael is waiting for you.” The host led them to their table. He could have simply pointed to the table, however, he chose to walk them over as if they were VIPs.

The restaurant was so small that it was impossible to miss the only man sitting at a table among the ten empty ones.

They found Michael typing away at his keyboard, an image that made a strong first impression on LaShana. He was early and already working while waiting. As soon as Michael saw them approach, he closed the lid of his laptop and placed it in a backpack sitting on the floor next to him. Then he asked the host if he could please take the backpack back with him. The host answered, “Sure.”

Michael rose from his seat, turned to LaShana, and said with a grin, “You must be LaShana, the woman unlucky enough

to have to work with Chris.” He walked toward her, extended his hand for a handshake, and then shook Chris’s hand. With a gesture toward the chairs, he added, “You guys can go ahead and take a seat.”

They complied, settling in. Michael sat across from them, directly facing LaShana, while Chris took the seat to her left.

“I was just kidding earlier,” Michael said. “Chris is an awesome guy. He’s been a great business partner, friend, and mentor. You’ll definitely enjoy working with him.”

“Michael is right. I am all of the above,” Chris said with a chuckle. LaShana could tell that they had a genuine mutual respect and admiration for one another.

The waiter arrived at their table, asking, “Are you folks eating now or in 30 minutes?” Michael looked at LaShana and said, “We usually like to start talking first, then start eating 30 minutes later. If you prefer, we can start by eating right away. What would you prefer?”

“Let’s talk first and eat later,” LaShana replied.

Chris turned to the waiter and asked, “What’s your name?
It’s my first time seeing you here.”

“My name is David, sir.”

“Hi, David, my name is Chris. Nice to meet you. You heard the
lady, we’ll eat in 30 minutes. Thanks.”

“No problem, sir.” David nodded and walked off.

Michael clapped his hands together. “Okay, guys. Let’s
play an icebreaker for team building. We’ll each share our
greatest strength and our biggest weakness when it comes to
achieving our goals. We’ll start with the goal first.”

“Do you guys want me to get started?” Chris asked.

“Go ahead,” Michael and LaShana replied in unison.

“Alright. My goal is to grow “**Tech & Tech**” to \$100M ARR
using retail store experiences. My strength is my ability to
create systems and processes for businesses. My weakness?

Creativity. I often feel like I'm not creative enough." Chris paused for a moment. "I tried all the affirmations to overcome that, nothing worked until I started partnering with creative people like Michael. He and I have great synergy—that's why we've been partners for so long."

"Would you like to go next?" Michael asked LaShana.

"Yes," she said confidently. "My goal is to reach \$3M ARR by franchising our current hotel. My strength? Customer experience. And my biggest weakness? Mindset. That's what I struggle with the most. The solution I've found? This mentorship! Thank you so much for having me!"

Then it was Michael's turn. "My goal, just like Chris's, is to grow "**Tech & Tech**" to \$100M ARR using retail stores. My strong suit? Mindset and sales. My weakness? Business building. You can probably tell already why we work so well together. His weakness is my strong suit, and my weakness is his strong suit." He leaned in a bit closer. "Do you know why we picked you over all the other candidates?"

“Over 10,000 candidates,” Chris added with a grin.

LaShana felt a bit nervous. “No, I don’t know.”

“There are a lot of reasons,” Michael began, “the most important one is that we believe we can provide you with value—and you can do the same for us. You’re strong where we’re weak, and we’re strong where you’re weak. Since we’ve passed the \$3M ARR mark, we’re confident we can help you get there and stretch that goal to \$30M. We can’t promise \$300M just yet—we haven’t reached that milestone ourselves—we are glad that we’ll be able to help you achieve your dreams. And, in turn, you’ll help us grow our company with your experience.

We don’t have any experience in the hospitality business, and retail stores are all about creating a welcoming, customer-focused experience. Your hotel has that down perfectly, and we want the same for our brick-and-mortar locations.”

Chris chimed in, “Michael is our crazy big thinker. The first time we set a big sales goal, my suggestion was to set the target at a comfortable stretch of \$100K for the day. That was big for us, considering our ARR was around \$800K at the time. An eighth of our previous year’s income in a single day. Crazy, right?”

“Yep,” LaShana replied with a raised eyebrow.

“I thought so too,” Chris said. “Then Michael said we should set the goal at \$1 million in a single day. I thought he was joking. Then I realized he was serious.”

Michael took over the story. “I told him it was possible because I saw someone do it at a conference. This guy did \$3 million in sales—in two hours. Seeing him do that made me realize just what’s possible. I wanted us to do the same thing.” Michael smiled. “I got Chris to believe we could do it, and we set our plan in motion. Well, more like Chris set the plan in motion—he’s great at that, right Chris?”

“Yes, sir.” Chris nodded with a smile.

“So... were you guys able to hit \$1 million in a day?” LaShana asked, leaning in, eager to know how it turned out.

They both exchanged a look, then answered in unison: “No.” “We only earned \$400K,” Michael said with a chuckle. “thanks to Chris’s planning, we’re now able to have two big sales days a month, usually ranging between \$200K and \$700K in sales.”

“Ooo, that’s awesome,” LaShana replied. She still couldn’t wrap her head around how they could be so nonchalant about earning \$400K in a single day. She had to remind herself that these were the kinds of numbers people in their position dealt with regularly. “Yeah, Chris is an awesome guy. Without him, I don’t think this company would even exist.”

“Ah, Michael, you’re gonna make me blush.” Chris laughed. “He’s right, though. Without me, this company would crash. Without him, the company would just stay stagnant. That’s basically how our partnership works. Michael guides us with his crazy ideas, sells for us, and I just make sure we build

the right systems so our boat can go where he wants it to go. It's a good partnership, and it's working."

Hearing their stories made LaShana feel like she was in good company, and she was glad she'd taken the chance to apply for the mentorship. She could see now that they weren't just successful—they were passionate and had fun playing the entrepreneurship game.

The waiter returned to the table. "Are you ready to order?"

"Yes, thank you, David," Chris answered for the group.

Then he turned to LaShana with a grin. "We asked a silly question on your application about ranking your top three favorite things to eat for dinner. Do you remember your answer?"

"Umm, Gyros, Lomo, and my mom's cooking." LaShana answered, a little sheepishly.

"That's what you wrote on your application—only the order was different. It was Gyros first, your mom's cooking second,

and Lomo third. Your current ranking is kinder to your mom's cooking. I always thought of second place as the 'first loser.' Now, her cooking is no longer the first loser, and she's still in your top three."

"Well, if you put it that way, I'll write that in a birthday card for her!"

"We should do that," Michael interjected, jotting down the idea in his notebook.

"Did my mom cook for you?" LaShana asked, now even more surprised.

"Well, Chris really wanted to bother your mom to cook for us as a surprise. I told him that if we asked your mom, it wouldn't be much of a surprise. So, we opted out of that idea. On the menu tonight, we've got Lomo and Gyros. Which would you like?"

"Both!" LaShana said enthusiastically.

“Both for the young lady,” the waiter replied, smiling. “And what about the gentlemen?”

“I also want both,” Michael said.

Chris followed suit, “Well, I guess I’ll take both too.”

Michael was surprised—Chris was usually a picky eater, and he hated wasting food. Normally, Chris only ordered what he was sure he would love. Today, it seemed like he was stepping out of his comfort zone. Michael smiled to himself, amused. He concluded that Chris’s pickiness worked well in business, it could sometimes be a bit frustrating in social situations like this.

“Okay, your orders are coming right up.” The waiter nodded and left. Within minutes of taking their orders, the waiter returned to their table with enough food to feed a small army. LaShana blinked in surprise, looking at the massive spread of Lomo Saltado, Gyros, and an array of other dishes. She could barely comprehend how everything had arrived so quickly—and in such large quantities.

"How was this done so quickly? And why so much food?" she asked, puzzled.

Michael gave her a knowing smile. "It pays to have friends in high places. We're close friends with the owner here, so we pre-ordered the meal. That's why it came out so fast."

Chris added, "And as for the quantity, we like to give food to soup kitchens whenever we go to fine dining places. It's our way of giving back."

LaShana's eyes softened as she listened. "That's really thoughtful of you guys."

Michael nodded. "Yeah, when we first got into business and capitalism, we read Adam Smith's "**Wealth of Nations**". He said that both poor and rich people eat the same amount of food—the difference is the rich just buy more expensive food more often. So when we do eat 'rich people's food,' we like to share it with those who can't easily afford it."

Chris continued, "I hated that whenever my mom and I had to go to food banks, we only got canned food. It felt like there was never any variety, just the same thing over and over. In a way, we're trying to bring the change we want to see in the world. I want the next kid who has to go to a shelter with their mom to eat something good, like Lomo Saltado or Gyros. It's about giving people a taste of something better."

LaShana smiled softly, touched by their generosity. "Well, that's very kind of you both."

"We try," Michael said with a modest shrug.

As they dug into their meal, the waiter dimmed the lights slightly and added some soft ambient music to the dining room. The atmosphere became more intimate, allowing them to continue their conversation about business, life lessons, and shared wisdom. The time flew by as they exchanged thoughts, strategies, and stories of their journeys.

About 40 minutes into their conversation, LaShana's phone started ringing. She initially ignored it, however the calls

kept coming, persistent and urgent. She continued to decline them then she received several text messages in quick succession. Michael noticed the tension in her face as she read them, sensing it was something important. He turned to her with a gentle and understanding smile.

"Hey, you should pick that up," he said, his tone reassuring. "It's not rude. You're a business owner, sometimes you've got to put out some fires."

LaShana hesitated for a moment, grateful for the suggestion. "Thank you," she said, then answered the call, stepping outside the restaurant to talk.

As soon as LaShana stepped out, Michael turned to Chris with a serious look.

"What's up, man? Why do you look so tense?" Chris asked, sensing a shift in his friend's demeanor. "I'm not going to the after-party," Michael said, his voice low. "Huh? Why not? Something came up?"

Michael shifted uncomfortably in his chair. "She's too cute, bro. I can't be spending that much time so close to her. It feels like a date, and I'm a little nervous." At least that's what he wanted to say. He realised how ridiculous that sounded so instead he replied, "I mean, I—uh, I just... I can't. I've got some stuff to deal with at home." He pulled out his phone and added, "My mom needs my help urgently, too."

Chris raised an eyebrow however, he didn't push him further. "Okay. You don't have to go. You do need to wait for her to finish her call first though."

"Yeah, that's what I was planning on doing," Michael muttered, his eyes shifting back to the table. "Good."

About 30 minutes later, LaShana returned to the restaurant. She looked over at the table and saw Michael and Chris typing away on their laptops, clearly settled back into their business model.

"Thanks for your patience, guys. Sorry it took so long," she said as she sat back down.

"No worries," Chris replied, putting his laptop away. "Things happen. Did everything get resolved?"

LaShana nodded with relief. "Yeah, it's all good. Just a mix-up with a new employee. Nothing too serious." As she sat down, the waiter came with two large platters of chocolate chip cookies, accompanied by jugs of warm and cold milk.

"LaShana," Michael said with a wide grin, "chocolate chip cookies are my favorite. I'd love to share them with you. I made them from scratch." LaShana's eyes widened in surprise. "You baked these yourself?"

Michael's face lit up at the question. "Yep! And there's not just one kind. I made four flavors!" He gestured to the two platters. "This plate," he pointed to one, "has classic chocolate chips and chocolate galaxy cookies. And the other one has a choconut chip and mint chocolate chip."

"Wow, you really went all out," LaShana said, impressed by the variety and quantity.

Chris leaned back in his chair, smiling fondly at his friend. "Yeah, he always does when he bakes. You know Michael—he can't just make one kind."

LaShana reached for one of each cookie, using the tongs the waiter had provided. "I'll just take one of each then."

Michael chuckled. "You're a smart woman. That's exactly why you won the mentorship."

Chris nodded, grinning. "Yeah, picking the right cookie is an essential business skill." They all laughed, enjoying the lighthearted moment. After another 10 minutes of conversation, Michael's phone rang. He glanced at the screen and sighed.

"Sorry, guys. It's time for me to head out," he said, standing up. "Chris, as always, it was great having dinner with you. It's been too long. We've been busy, I'm glad we finally got to catch up."

He turned to LaShana, his voice warm with appreciation. "It was a great meeting you today. I'm excited to work with you."

You're a phenomenal individual, and I look forward to seeing both of our businesses grow together during this mentorship."

LaShana smiled brightly. "Thank you for the opportunity. You guys are super cool. I'm really looking forward to working with both of you." Chris cleared his throat and smirked. "Especially with me." LaShana laughed, and Michael joined in, shaking his head. "Yes, especially with you," she said, a twinkle in her eye.

The three of them stood up. Michael reached for Chris's hand, shaking it firmly. Then he turned to LaShana. He subconsciously started to go for a hug, at the last moment, he realized what he was doing and awkwardly dropped his arm. He extended his hand instead, and they shook hands, both chuckling at the moment.

"I'll see you both next week," Michael said, giving each of them a nod before heading toward the door.

Self development

On his way home, Michael's mind was racing.

“Fuck, she’s even prettier in person. She smells phenomenal. She’s super cool. She loves business and reading. She’s actually really kind and has a fantastic personality. Shit, she’s definitely my type. I haven’t met a woman like her in years. Why... Why do I feel this way? Is it just the business connection, or is it more?”

His thoughts spiraled, even after he tried to shake them off. “Focus, Michael. You’ve got work to do.” No matter how hard he tried, his thoughts kept drifting back to her—LaShana, her energy, her warmth, the way she spoke about business and about life... and how, when they shook hands, he felt a spark.

He laughed to himself. You've got a mentorship to run. Focus on that.

“Why did I have to meet her as a mentee? We should have met anywhere else in the world. Why did this have to happen? Chris shouldn't have picked her! How do I tell Chris about this? I can't tell Chris, it's too embarrassing. Fuck, why is this happening? Honestly, she's the type of woman that Napoleon Hill would advise me to marry. We could have a phenomenally successful life together. If only she wasn't my mentee. Man, I hate this!”

Michael hadn't felt a crush this strong since middle school, when he had his first real crush. She was also the first person he ever asked out. He'd gathered all the courage he had, as a pre-teen with really low self-esteem, only for her to reject him. The impact on his self-image was so devastating that he stopped trying to express attraction to women altogether.

He never had a girlfriend, nor did he ask anyone out again until he was 21. During his senior year, he took a psychology

elective and met Alisha, his first girlfriend. After several one-on-one study sessions, she said, “You know, Michael, I don’t need to study with you, right? My grades are fine. I only ask for these study sessions because I’m attracted to you. I still don’t know if you feel the same way. My friends told me that boys can be clueless, so Michael, do you like me too, and would you like to date?”

That was the first time a woman had ever shown interest in him—at least the first time he’d known it. Since he found her pretty and always looked forward to their private study sessions, his answer was easy: “Yes, I’m attracted to you, and I’d like to date you.” That night, he called Chris to share the good news. Chris was ecstatic for him. It was a great moment—Michael had finally entered a relationship. They dated for three years, sadly, they broke up. He was back to square one.

His self-esteem was better now, though still not where it should be. He enjoyed being in a relationship and realized that

he didn't want to wait another 21 years to find someone again. He had to take action.

So, he began reading books on how to attract women. After gathering all the knowledge he could, he set himself a tough challenge: ask out 100 attractive women. He called this his shock therapy. He made a promise to himself that he would accomplish this goal, no matter how many NOs or YESes he received. His first opportunity came one night when he went to the grocery store, right after making that promise to himself.

He spotted a really cute woman—5'4, pale skin, blue eyes, freckles on her face, and long, curly brown hair that bounced as she spoke on the phone. When he saw her, he froze. She was “an attractive woman,” and he had to ask her out. He was afraid. Since she was on the phone, he thought it would be inappropriate to interrupt her. That was just an excuse he told himself to avoid facing the potential rejection.

As he wandered the store, still thinking about how he should have asked her out, he regretted not doing it. He

reminded himself, “If I see her again, I won’t run away.” When he finally finished shopping and made his way to the checkout, he was stunned to see the beautiful woman was in front of him in line.

He smiled, relieved that fate had given him another chance. Then, fear set in. He had to speak to her now, and he promised himself he would. The excuses came flooding in: “What if she’s busy?” “What if she’s married?” “What if she gets creeped out?” “What if she thinks I’m ugly, like a blobfish?” “What if she laughs at me?”

For a split second, their eyes locked, and she smiled at him. He smiled back and waved. He had no idea how he did it, his body acted without thinking. His whole body felt warm, and his heart started to race. To his surprise, she waved back.

With that momentum, he approached her and said, “Hi, my name is Michael. What’s your name?” She answered, “I’m Abigail, nice to meet you, Michael.” He was so nervous that he

forgot her name for a moment, he quickly recovered. Now, what was he supposed to say next?

“Um, what are you going to cook?” he asked.

She enthusiastically replied, “Lasagna for my roommate and myself! I saw you were picking up hamburger buns in aisle 8—are you making hamburgers for you and your girlfriend?”

He found it a little odd that she was asking about his girlfriend, and that she was paying attention to what he was shopping for. Then, the lessons from his books rang in his head: Attention—she’s interested.

She was giving him all the signs:

- She noticed him.
- She asked about his girlfriend.
- She kept the conversation going.
- She was playing with her hair.

“No, I’m making chicken sandwiches for meal prep this weekend,” he said. “I’ve been wanting to do it for a while now.

I'm single. You're kind enough to cook for your roommate. Are you also cooking for your boyfriend?"

"Oh wow, I love it when men cook for themselves!" she said, smiling. "No, I'm single too. Are you following a specific recipe for those sandwiches?"

Wait, she's still talking to me, and she doesn't have a boyfriend. Michael thought. She might actually be attracted to me. "Well, I don't really know any recipes. I'm just following this one," he said, pointing to a website on his phone.

He noticed she was about to be rung up next, and he realized that this was his moment to act. He took a deep breath and said, "Hey, before you go, I think you're really pretty. If the feeling is mutual, let's exchange numbers."

She smiled, the same warm smile she had given him earlier. "Yes, it's mutual," she said. "I kept looking at you while you were shopping." She chuckled nervously.

That confession sent a rush of dopamine through him. His courage had paid off, and in that moment, he felt like “the man”. He handed her his phone with the contacts page open. When she returned his phone to him, he took a moment to glance at her name again. Abigail. He reminded himself.

“Next,” the cashier called.

“It was nice meeting you, Abigail. Do you want a hug before we go?”

To his surprise, she said yes.

They hugged, and he told her they’d get in touch. She responded that she was looking forward to it.

After texting each other for a few days, Abigail suddenly ghosted him. The confidence boost from that interaction was exactly what he needed. He continued his goal of asking out 100 women. The next ten women he asked out all said no. He took all the rejections with pride, knowing he was bettering himself.

Along the way, he learned the skill of approaching women. He discovered that he was indeed attractive to some, and he began to pick up on the signals of attraction. Now, whenever he saw a woman he liked, he introduced himself, made his interest known, and asked for the close.

Chapter 3

The Afterparty

Ten minutes after Michael left the restaurant, Chris and LaShana headed to the afterparty. Chris began to debrief LaShana on the team they would be working with. There were only four other people on the team who would lead the retail division of the company.

The team consisted of Alex, Becky, Katie, and John. She learned that Alex has a lot of experience as a manager for many different retail stores. He has accumulated over 20 years of experience. His mission was to manage the first store and then train the upcoming managers. A manager's manager was his real mission. Katie was the financial guru for the project. She was the one who managed the funds for the project. Becky

was their buyer. Her purpose was to find the products and services that the project needed to succeed. She worked closely with Katie. One had the money, the other had the spending. John was a jack of all trades. He was someone that Chris and Michael trusted. He was actually the first to champion and volunteer for the retail division.

Chris, who was conservative about how they grow, was reluctant. When John backed up Michael's idea, he knew that this was what they needed to do. So they did. Since John championed the idea, he won the project manager position. His task was to handle the general vision of the retail experience and how it would benefit the company.

They decided to go by taxi to the after party. They arrived right on time. They found John wearing his signature look: black dress pants, a white shirt, and a red "**John - Tech & Tech**" shirt that he got the first time he got promoted at the company (four promotions ago). He was proud of his career at "**Tech & Tech.**"

Across from John was Alex, who was sitting in an Adidas tracksuit.

The two women were not there yet. Alex was the first one to get up. “Hi, you must be LaShana, it’s great to meet you!” After hearing Alex’s welcoming message, John turned around to look. Once he saw her, he got up and said, “Hi. It’s really nice to meet you.” She was a little surprised that he showed up in a tracksuit. It was also really cool; she was glad to see that there was variety and that they were able to express their individuality. It was not a monotone company where everyone was wearing suits or adhering to a company dress code.

“Wow, everyone is dressed up! Even me! You see, this tracksuit is actually my formal tracksuit. Hope you guys enjoy it,” Alex said, laughing. That made LaShana smile.

“It’s a nice formal tracksuit,” she replied. Although it was a tracksuit, she saw that he cared for his appearance. His hair was well-groomed, his nails were maintained and looked

healthy. His beard was lined up, looking like he had just had it done that morning.

“Where are the ladies?” Chris asked. Right when he asked, two women entered, laughing with each other. They were the two ladies Chris was asking for.

“Sorry, guys! My train arrived late, and since Katie was kind enough to wait for me at the metro, we are both slightly late,” Becky said. She had a habit of being right on time or a few minutes late, so that did not surprise anyone. Katie was punctual, so her late arrival was not expected.

“Welcome, guys! It's nice to see y'all again. Our new mentee, LaShana, is joining us for tonight's after party,” Chris said.

“Hi, LaShana! It's great to meet you,” they said in delayed unity.

Becky introduced herself to LaShana first. “I'm Becky, mother of a Chihuahua. I am a fan of Taylor Swift and Ye. I am the procurement officer for the project. That means I get to spend my days shopping with a big budget! It's the best job in

the world!” Then Katie introduced herself: “My name is Katie. I am a first-time mom to a beautiful baby girl named Kristine. She’s 3 years old, and I have been married to my awesome husband for 5 years now. His name is Sanjay. I am the CFO for our retail division. I am here to make sure that our numbers make sense so that Becky can stay out of trouble.”

“It's Nice to meet you guys!” LaShana replied.

“The pleasure is all mine. If you have any questions, don’t be afraid to ask us” Becky added.

“Actually I have a question. What do you guys think of Michael? I’ll be spending most of my time with Chris, I’m just curious” LaShana asked the ladies.

“Michael is actually a really awesome guy. He honestly inspires me to do better. He can be pretty standoffish, which is really interesting considering he is our best salesperson. He is much looser when he drinks, though!” Katie replied.

“Chris told me the same thing,” LaShana added.

“There’s a rumor that Michael doesn’t hire women he’s attracted to if they’re going to be working directly with him,” Katie said.

“Oh, then he definitely is not attracted to me,” LaShana thought to herself, feeling a little disappointed. He was just going to mentor her, and she was just here to help “**Tech & Tech.**” There was no room for romance. Oh well, she thought, I still get to learn and this way I won’t have to fantasize about a dumb crush. It was her favorite trope in romance books, when a boss and his secretary get together. Unfortunately, and fortunately, this situation wouldn’t be happening to her.

Then Katie added, “I’m surprised you were picked; you’re very pretty. He probably has bad taste, then!” This made her blush and made her feel better about herself. She thanked her with a bright smile and said, “That’s very kind of you, Katie.”

Becky chimed in on the rumor: “Yeah, there was a secretary that was flirting with him. He fired her. To be honest, she was a little much—messaging him outside of work hours and started dressing ‘sexy.’ He rejected her and told her that it

was inappropriate for her to continue. She thought he was playing hard to get and didn't accept the rejection. She continued, so he fired her. After that event, he created company policies around dating. He is not against it completely. Romantic relationships between leaders and subordinates are strongly discouraged, not outright banned."

Then they returned to the table to sit with the guys. It was a fun experience for all of them. They spoke about business and personal lives. The only thing that disappointed her during the after party was that they wouldn't be meeting often. It's a monthly event for them to speak about the progress of their respective duties and the overall project.

"How was the last mentee? What made her succeed?" she asked them.

"She was always ready to rumble. We ran into an issue that happened at 10 p.m., the day before the project was to be delivered. Our vendor's truck broke down with the materials we needed for an event that was happening at 8 a.m. We were all

freaking out and had no idea what to do; we were frozen in place. Then she said, ‘I just rented a van, who’s coming with me?’”

“I was in the van with her,” John added. “She picked me up at my house in the dead of night.”

“Well, we needed your help. She went to the vendor and, with John’s help, they packed the essential things to bring to our rented space.”

“By the time we were done, it was already 2 a.m. and the event was at 8. I was so tired and wanted to just go home after getting there. Then I saw her setting things up. I was pissed, haha, because I knew I had to stay if she did. I just wanted to go to sleep and asked her why she was doing that. We would have the morning crew come in and fix things up.”

“Do you know what she replied?” John asked LaShana.

“She wanted to lower the chances of something going wrong,” she replied. They all nodded their heads in approval.

“Yep, you are right. She thought that since we didn’t have all the equipment that was needed, there could be problems. If they set up as much as they could, the morning crew would just be able to fill in wherever the holes were.”

John added, “We left there at 6:00 a.m., right when the morning crew showed up. She showed them where everything was and what needed to be fixed. She volunteered us to help them. I told her to stop; we had to go to sleep.”

John continued, “I was part of the morning crew,” Katie said. “They basically did 90% of the work for us. That freed up a lot of time for us, and we were able to get the last couple of things that were needed to make the event run smoothly.”

LaShana knew that she had big shoes to fill.

“You don’t have to do that, or look to do something like that,” Chris said. “It was an outlier situation, and we are glad that she stepped up and did all of that. We were very thankful for her driving to pick up the things. She went all out with setting up the event. She stretched herself thin. She had no reason to

do that. Don't get me wrong, we greatly appreciated it, especially the morning crew," he said, looking at Katie. She smiled back. "As long as you help us with the retail space by sharing your experience in growing your own business. You have to be nice and easy to work with, which you are already showing. Everything will work out well!"

She knew what she had to do to succeed. Success meant putting maximum effort to help them grow "**Tech & Tech**" and applying what she learned during the mentorship to grow her own business.

The party ended at 11:00 p.m. Everyone shared what they had learned during the week and what they would be doing in the upcoming weeks and months to accomplish the mission of a successful retail launch. After everything was said and done, they said their goodbyes. LaShana ordered a taxi and went home.

A New Mentor

Ring ring.

LaShana's phone rings. It's a call from Chris. "Hi, Chris, how are you?"

"Hi, LaShana, is this a good time for us to talk?"

"Yes..." she was scared. A call that starts with that question usually comes with bad news.

"My wife is dealing with postpartum depression. I will have to spend more time with our children while she gets better. My schedule is going to change drastically. I will only be able to work about 10 hours a week until my wife feels better. I have to take care of her too, not just my kids. Don't worry, you won't lose out on the mentorship. Michael will take over the program.

He's not as good as me, he's still very good. Does that sound fair?"

"Yes, it's no problem. I hope things go well, and she heals quickly! I will definitely miss having you as a mentor. If you ever need help, like babysitting, let me know!"

"Thank you so much, LaShana. You are wonderful. I'll definitely take you up on that offer if we need it."

"My pleasure."

Then, an hour later, her phone rings again. This time, it's a call from Michael. "As you are aware, LaShana, Chris will not be able to continue being your mentor. I will be the one mentoring you from now on. Are you available to get dinner with me on Friday so that we can talk more about this change? It will be at the same restaurant where we first met, and it will be at 7 p.m.," Michael asked.

"Yes, I can make it," she replied.

On Friday at 6:50, LaShana and Michael were seated to talk about the changes in the mentorship. At their table, there

were only two notepads, two pens, a mentor, a mentee, and a secret attraction.

“For a large part of the rest of the mentorship, we are going to be going to a lot of commercial properties to find the right location, and I would love your professional experience. Are you fine tagging along?” Michael started the meeting.

“Would I be fine tagging along? I would love to. I want to spend as much time with you as possible,” she thought to herself, and only replied to him, “Yes, that’s fine.” LaShana’s desire came true. She was going to be spending a lot more time with her prince charming.

“Since we are going to spend a lot of time together now, I would love to learn more about you from you. Can you share with me your story?” he asked her.

He learned that she was the first person in her family to own a hotel. This was even more impressive considering that both her mother, her mother’s family, her father, and her father’s family had worked in the hotel industry. Michael was blown away by that fact. Her grandfather was a cook, her grandma

was a front desk receptionist. Her dad was a janitor at the hotel where her mom worked as a consultant. Her mom's job was to help hotels increase occupancy. Her parents were married for 9 years until her dad passed away when she was 7 years old. Her mom got pregnant the week before her dad died from a brain aneurysm.

Fortunately, she had the time to create some core memories with him. She had memories like him giving her piggyback rides to school or the time that she had a fight with a friend in preschool and her dad helped her mend their friendship. That girl became her best friend and the only person in school that she could talk to about her dad's passing. Her mom (when she wasn't at work) and her grandparents raised her.

She loved her family. Her sister was her best friend. After she blurted out her life story to Michael, she got embarrassed. She had told him more than he had asked. She was not the type to share that her dad passed away with

people, yet there was something about her mentor that allowed her to feel comfortable sharing something so personal.

Michael was mesmerized by her story and was only brought back to reality when she asked him, “I’ve always wanted to know—successful people like you—what do you fear?” “Well, that was a very kind compliment. I think fears change as you change. When we first started, I actually had a fear of calling people. How did I deal with it? I just practiced by calling. Now my fears are different.”

Intrigued, she asks, “What is your fear now?” “My fear is not being able to have it all. That I cannot have a happy family and continue being a good CEO. We have to make sure that our customers continue to have an awesome experience and that our employees have great working conditions. As I get older, I yearn to get married and be mentally, physically, and emotionally present to raise my children with the woman I love.”

“That sounds great, what makes you think you cannot

have that?” she asked, and he answered:

“There are three scenarios I see, and none are great.

1. “**Tech & Tech**” falls apart because I have to focus on my wife and kids and take away my attention from the business.
2. “**Tech & Tech**” continues doing great. We grow more than I can imagine now. The cost of that is sacrificing time with my wife, and time with my children. Which can lead to divorce and my children hating me.
3. Or I try to juggle all three and live in constant worry that I didn’t give the business, my wife, or my children enough attention constantly.”

Rich people really just have human problems, she thought to herself.

“Can I tell you what I think?” she asked him.

“Yes, let me know what you think,” he answered.

“You could definitely have a successful marriage, a great

relationship with your kids, and a prosperous business. You could possibly run the business with your wife.”

“Run the business with my wife?” That didn’t make sense to Michael. The man who did not want to work with women he found attractive—the man who was attracted to his mentee and torturing himself over it—was confronted with a paradigm shift. “How could that work? Don’t you want to separate business from your private life?” he asked her, feeling like she had the complete authority to give him the right answer.

“If you’re married and own a business, there is never a separation. Think about it: even if your wife was a stay-at-home mom, she would be the one that you share your wins with and your lessons. She is the person who will support you when the journey gets hard. And if you guys work together, she would be your most trusted advisor. The success of the business affects your personal life, and your personal life affects your business. A ‘perfect’ situation could be working with your wife at **”Tech & Tech”** at possibly different time slots so that you guys can raise your children. You could also raise your kids around **”Tech &**

Tech.” You might want them to one day manage it. Wouldn’t it be good if they had a lot of experience by watching their parents work on the business and be happy in a successful marriage?”

Michael was surprised by how simple she made things sound. Well, he had to remind himself that simple did not always mean easy. It simply meant that it was doable, and she had just given him a scenario that was better than all the ones he had thought of by himself.

“Thank you, that was actually something I never considered. You are right. It is achievable. Now the task at hand is to find that woman, hahaha,” he said, subconsciously looking straight into her eyes. That last sentence and the eye contact gave her butterflies, and her infatuation took over her thinking. She started picturing herself being the CXO (Chief Customer Experience Officer) of “**Tech & Tech**”. She saw herself working along with her husband while their daughters and son

completed their homework in their office. RING RING RING
Michael's phone interrupted her and brought her back to reality.

“Well, LaShana, it's time for us to end this meeting. It was a very productive one. Also, thank you for helping me figure out how to reach my family and business goals.” “Yeah, no problem. Glad that it was helpful!” she replied, getting up from the chair as he had done just seconds earlier to shake his hand.

They shook hands countless times, this time something was a little different. She felt how big his hand was, she felt the veins popping out of his hand, she saw how sharp his knuckles were. She felt the warmth and protection as his hand covered hers during the handshake.

“Did you know that you have really attractive hands?” came out of her mouth.

“Thank you. You are surprisingly not the first person to have said that to me. Years ago, a woman told me that I had beautiful hands and wouldn't stop talking about them or

massaging them. Never thought much about my hands until that day. She made me think that I could become a hand model,” he started laughing. “Thank you for the compliment. You have beautiful hands yourself!”

That reply made her blush, and she quickly looked down to the floor to hide. She couldn't bear to look into his eyes to let him see what that innocent “you too” was doing to her. Then their handshake ended, and they parted ways.

Chapter 5

What Did I Do?

LaShana on Her Way Home:

OMG, THAT WAS EMBARRASSING!!!

AHHHH, WHY DID I TELL HIM HIS HANDS WERE
ATTRACTIVE?!?

DOES HE THINK THAT'S WEIRD DDD!!! AHHHHHHH

DOES HE THINK I'M LIKE THAT WOMAN!!??

Well, no, I didn't massage them.

OMG, HE SAID MY HANDS WERE BEAUTIFUL!!

BEAUTIFUL!! MY HANDS, OMG.

OKAY, okay, calm down...

Breathe in... breathe out, breathe in... breathe out...

Let's see what happened. Okay, I told him that his hands

were attractive. Yes, that was bold, so that was a job well done. His hands are really hot. I had to let him know. He said thank you. WAIT, HE SAID MY HANDS WERE BEAUTIFUL, OMGGGG. He likes my hands too!!!

Michael on His Way Home:

“I did too much.

I shouldn’t have complimented her like that. Fuck.

Why didn’t I just say “thank you” or “thanks, you have nice hands too”? Why did I say “you have beautiful hands”? That was too much.

Thankfully, she was the one who started it.

Actually, maybe she’ll think I was just being a gentleman, returning a compliment. She did have nice hands. It wasn’t a lie.

Fuck, I wish she wasn’t my mentee.

She looked great in her outfit.

When we shook hands, it felt different.

It felt like she was asking me to kiss her. In regular situations, I would have gone for it... Unfortunately, this was not a normal situation. She is my mentee, and the possibility of rejection could ruin the reputation of 'WEM.' Although she's very, VERY pretty, damaging the program is not worth it."

Michael in His Home Office

As soon as he sat down in his chair, he started jotting down ideas on how to get rid of this annoying crush. He knew that just wanting to get rid of it wasn't going to happen. He had already tried that. He told himself that this was nothing, it was not nothing. He couldn't lie to himself.

He knew and accepted that he was attracted to her. He also realized that she was showing signs of attraction. His 100 women experiment had taught him a lot: how to value himself, how to handle rejection, how to be confident, and how to recognize when a woman was attracted to him. So he had to

get rid of this crush. Fast.

“Maybe I should stop going to the properties with her?”

That was a smart idea. It would create distance between them since they had to look at commercial properties... together.

Unfortunately, that wouldn't work. That would hurt the business.

Not going to the properties was not an option.

“Maybe I can have her work with someone else,” another potential solution. Only problem, he had already given her his word that he would mentore her, since Chris wasn't going to be able to mentor her. He could not take his word back; he had no good excuses. The only excuse he had was that he wanted to distance himself from her so that he didn't fall for her even more. He couldn't be that honest with her. He wanted to avoid that entire situation in the first place.

Since he was running out of ideas, he decided to get back to work on the financial health of the different departments of the business and tasked his subconscious mind to find a solution.

As he was going over the reports, he saw nothing wrong. He

was hoping to find some major issue to distract him from the problem at hand. Everything was looking fine in the ship that he was guiding. The only thing that wasn't fine: his feelings towards his mentee.

“**EUREKA!**” he screamed out loud, so loud that he was worried someone in his empty condo might have heard him. His subconscious mind did find the solution. “You just have to date someone else. That would take your mind off of her.” – was the answer.

That was a strategy that he learned after he became enamored with one of his co-workers when he was a car salesman. She was beautiful, kind, and she was the sales rep to beat. They would constantly compete; sometimes she would win, and sometimes he would win. That attracted him even more. At that point in time, he was confident enough to ask out women, except with his colleague, there was a fear that rejection could create a toxic working environment for them. Nonetheless, they would occasionally eat lunch together and speak about work and their friendly competition.

The more time he spent with her, the deeper the attraction grew, and the stronger the fear of the consequences of asking her out. It became really bad. Whenever he saw her laughing with a male client, he would feel jealousy. So Michael did the next best thing (asking her out would have been the best option): he went to the internet for advice on how to deal with it. The internet guru told him the best way to handle such a situation was to date someone else. It would stop him from feeling like she was “the one,” plus the added extra benefit that it wouldn't affect his job.

So Michael went out and found himself another prospect. He went out with Amanda. She was beautiful, kind, ambitious, and positive. These qualities, plus the additional quality that she was not a co-worker, made her attractive. As he spent more time with her, he was able to forget his co-worker. He no longer tried to read her “signs” or spend time thinking about her. Things like: “Does her sitting at lunch with me mean she is attracted to me?”, “Why is she not replying to my messages?”, “Is it okay to date your co-worker?”, and “How to get over a

crush?” were no longer embarrassing questions that he had to Google.

It was a great thing that he pursued another woman and never asked her out because a month after his first date with Amanda, Katie announced her engagement to her boyfriend of two years in the work group chat.

Fast forward to the present, it clicked. He knew what he had to do: he had to find a new prospect to pursue. Fortunately for him, Katherine from his Speaker’s Club had been showing interest in him. Since she was interested in him, it would make it easier. “Michael, you are a genius,” he affirmed out loud to himself. He texted Katherine, and after a couple of exchanges, they were able to set up a date for the upcoming Friday.

Rejoicing that he had found the solution to his problem, Michael went back to work happy, smiling, and with a huge weight off his shoulders.

First Date

[Text From Michael]

Hi Katherine,

Looking forward to having a fun date with you Friday afternoon.

This is our itinerary for our date. It will allow us to have fun and get to know each other better.

☐ 5:00 PM - Meet At The Train Station

We will meet at the information booth at Penn Station.

I will be wearing a black suit with a gift for you. We'll walk to the Biblio together.

☐ 5:10 PM - Drinks At The Biblio

We have a private room rented until 8:30.

We will talk about some of our favorite books.

Don't bring your card, just bring your ID. Everything is prepaid. I just need your confirmation.

☐ 9:00 PM - Take You Home

PS

Let me know if you have any questions or concerns. See you soon.

He was the type to always plan dates. That was the first time Katherine had received something like that for a first date. She didn't know that men still acted that way in this day and age.

Maybe not any man, maybe only princes acted like that. She was smitten by him. She saw the "9:00 PM take home..." and her imagination ran wild with the possibilities of what 9:00 PM meant. "He must have done it on purpose," she thought to herself. Why would everything be broken down except the take-home part? She was right—Michael did do it on purpose.

At 4:40, Katherine arrived at their meeting spot. She wanted to make sure she was early. As she looked around to make sure she was at the right spot, she saw Michael walking toward her from the café where he had been sitting.

“Wow, Katherine, you look beautiful,” he welcomed her with a nice compliment. The compliment landed perfectly; he could see her pale cheeks turn beet red and her fidgeting from nervousness. Then he made his next move—he hugged her. That hug also went well. Michael wasn’t blind to Katherine’s poor attempt to hide her desire for him. As soon as Michael wrapped his arms around her, her head softly landed on his muscular chest, and wrapped her arms around his waist. The longer the hug lasted, the more intoxicated she became with his smell. She was starting to melt into his arms. That hug felt like the only protection she needed in this world. After their hug, Michael grabbed her hand and said, “This way to the Biblio.”

The Biblio had been built just a couple of years earlier. Michael was one of the first customers and quickly became a regular. It’s an adult library with an age requirement of 21. Customers are allowed to drink, and they can read at the bar, in the lobby, or in private rooms.

As soon as they entered the Biblio, they heard, “Hi Michael, your room is ready upstairs.” He replied, “Thank you,

Emilio,” then grabbed her hand again and guided her to the elevator. The “room” that Emilio mentioned was actually an entire floor that he had rented out. It was their own private library for the evening. She received a tour of the library from her prince.

As they were searching for a book to read, Katherine said, “Hey Michael, do you come here often?” He knew what she meant by that question, so he decided to answer her honestly.

“Yes, it’s one of my favorite places. Most often, I come here just to read, sometimes—although rarely—as a place to work, and sometimes for a first date. I love this place, and I love women who read, so it’s a win-win.”

After they found their books, Michael showed her where the reading room with the comfiest chairs was. In the reading room, there was one sofa, two chairs, and a table that had two glasses, an assortment of wines, and liquor for self-service.

“You can serve yourself whatever you like,” Michael told her as he poured himself a glass of wine and sat down on the

sofa. She saw him sitting right in the middle of the sofa, like he was inviting her to join him. She wanted to, however her nerves were getting to her. She poured herself a shot of whiskey, drank it, then poured herself another one. With liquid courage, she sat on the couch right next to her prince.

“Okay, we will read our books for an hour, then we’ll talk about them. I’d also love to learn more about you. You seem to be a really interesting woman. Is that cool?” Michael asked.

“Yes, that sounds fun!” she replied. It was a fairytale date so far for Katherine.

Ring ring His timer went off to let them know that the reading section had ended. He turned to Katherine and said, “Time’s up on reading. What book did you pick, and what made you decide to read it?”

“I picked up the book *The Diary of the \$100M CEO*. Honestly, you were the reason. I want to understand you more. What book did you pick?” she replied.

“That’s very nice of you. I picked up this young adult romance,

New Kid, New Crush. My decision for choosing that book was simple: it's short, seems sweet, and matches the theme of today—a romance story.”

“Wow, you're very romantic. You're the first handsome man I've met who's romantic.” The alcohol was allowing her to say what she really felt. “Honestly, the way you look, the way you act, and the success you've achieved is ridiculous. You're one of the hottest men in this city, if not the hottest.”

The liquid courage gave her too much courage! She was wearing her heart on her sleeve. She let him know just how attractive she found him.

“You're too kind. I'm glad that the feeling is mutual. You are one of the most beautiful women I've seen since I moved to the city. Not only are you beautiful, you are kind, you are hardworking and humble.”

The phrase “...you're one of the most beautiful women...” rang through her head a couple of times, and every time she replayed his compliment, she blushed.

Maybe it was because of the alcohol, or maybe because she found him very attractive, she couldn't stop complimenting him.

"You're very handsome."

"You're charismatic."

"You're super cool."

She was surprised that she was able to say all that without exploding from embarrassment. There was one phrase she wanted to tell him, yet couldn't... she wanted to say, "Take me home and have your way with me." She had never been that forward before, maybe because she had never met a man as attractive as him.

Unfortunately, she couldn't bring herself to say it. So, she took more liquid courage, sadly, it wasn't giving her anymore courage, it was only getting her more drunk. She realized that if she had more, she would end up throwing up, so she decided to stop drinking alcohol and instead replaced it with water.

Afterall, she didn't want to embarrass herself by throwing up on her date, nor to wake up in the morning with a killer hangover.

“Will you take me home? I'm too drunk to get home,” that was her hail mary. He thought of saying no because he knew that she was attracted to him, and he also now realized that he was really attracted to LaShana. Throughout the night, all he could think of was how much more fun it would have been if LaShana was the woman he took on the date.

The only problem was that she was right—she was too drunk to go home alone. He didn't feel comfortable letting her go home in a taxi in her drunken state. “Yes, I'll be taking you home,” he responded. She felt relief; she had placed herself in a vulnerable and somewhat desperate position asking him that question. After he said yes, her fear turned into hope.

She became excited when she heard “yes”. She imagined him taking her to her bedroom (she made sure to clean it before the date) and fucking until the morning. Her imagination was getting hotter than all the shots she had taken.

Michael, meanwhile, was thinking of the best way to reject her. He felt bad for what was happening. He knew that she was

feeling him in a way that he could not reciprocate. He did not want to lead her on.

“Okay, I will take the taxi with her, walk her home, say goodnight, and text her a rejection in the morning.” That was his plan as he saw the taxi pull up to pick them up.

He opened the door for her and helped her get in the car. He was a gentleman—and WOW, what cologne he was wearing, It smelled phenomenal she thought. Maybe it was the cologne, or maybe it was the man that was wearing it, however the result was the same. She wanted to sniff him like a dog who hadn’t seen their owner in weeks. Not wanting to be too weird, she opted to lay her head on his shoulder.

Once her head landed on his shoulder, Michael became a deer in headlights. He didn’t mind a little kinship; he just didn’t want to lead her on. After all, touching leads to more touching—that is the law of seduction.

He contemplated removing her head from his shoulder, he decided that since she was drunk, he had to be kind and just let her rest.

His big broad shoulders made her feel protected, and his cologne was not sobering her up—her alcohol drunkenness was just being replaced with a lustful drunkenness. She went to grab his hand, and Michael took his hand away.

Her excitement turned into depression. Michael couldn't help to notice how much the mood had changed. He had a soft heart, so he grabbed her hand and held it between his own. Her mood instantly changed, and she was excited again. She tried moving their hands closer to her thighs, and both times she tried, Michael brought their hands back to the middle. She took the hint and decided to be satisfied that her head was on the shoulder of her nice-smelling hottie while he held her hand. That car ride was the highlight of her day.

“We’re here,” the taxi driver said as he turned off the car. They were dropped off at the entrance of her apartment

complex. “How far is your apartment?” he asked her.

“It’s about a 6-minute walk,” she replied, wishing that it was a longer walk.

“Okay, I will walk you there, then head home.” She wanted to reply that he could just stay. She couldn't do it; the liquid courage was leaving her.

They walked in silence, only interrupted when she had to give directions on which turn to take. Eventually, they arrived at the front of her apartment building. She was in the first unit on the left. She walked to the first step of the stairs and turned around to face Michael. “Do you want to get some water inside?” she asked him. He knew what was happening, and because he wasn’t interested, he replied, “I’m fine, thank you for offering. I may have had too much water already!”

To which she replied, “Do you want to use the bathroom?” He said, “No need. The bladder feels pretty empty.” She got the message. She thanked him for the date, thanked him for helping her, and told him how much she appreciated it. She was screaming, “I'm attracted to you,” “I want you to come

inside,” and “I want you to kiss me” as she kept looking at his lips.

Michael couldn't ignore the signs, even if he closed his eyes, he would still be able to see them. He knew that he couldn't lead her on, yet he found it difficult to reject her kiss. Maybe it was because of how attractive she was, or how eager she was, he did not say no when she went up on the tips of her toes to kiss him with her eyes closed.

When they kissed, he felt nothing besides the physical sensation of the kiss. He felt no passion, no attraction—just flesh on flesh. The thoughts of LaShana flashed in his mind. Why am I thinking about her now? he asked himself.

As their kiss ended, Katherine wanted more and told Michael, “We can continue kissing inside.” He could not keep going because he knew he would hurt her—himself—and LaShana. He felt like he was cheating on LaShana, even though they weren't together.

“I have to go. I have meetings in the morning, and I have a meeting with LaShana.” He didn’t know why he mentioned her name, Katherine picked up on his tone shift when he said it. Maybe she was just imagining things—she knew she probably wasn’t.

“I understand,” she said. “Thank you for walking me. It was a great date. Let me know whenever you want to go out again.”

“I will,” he replied. She knew that it was unlikely she would get another date, at least she had gotten to spend a nice evening with him.

[Michael on his way home]

“Okay, Michael, think about this clearly. Is LaShana different from other girls? Yes. Is she really, though? Yes. What makes her so special? She is very pretty. So are lots of other women. Millions, if not billions, of beautiful women in the world. She is kind. So are most women. Being beautiful and nice are not mutually exclusive. I’ve met many women like that. Heck, a lot of women in my company fit that

description. The attractive ones just don't work directly with me. She's ambitious—maybe that's it. I actually don't really care if she wants to be a stay-at-home wife or if she wants to rule the world. That has no impact on my attraction to her. It's cool talking to her. Maybe that's it. I can spend the entire day speaking to her. We have a lot of common interests, like-mindedness, and similar goals for the future. Katherine also fits the same description, yet LaShana was all I could think about during our date."

He knew what he had to do next. He had to text Katherine.

"Hi Katherine, I really enjoyed our date. You're extremely beautiful inside and out. Unfortunately, I didn't feel the chemistry I was looking for."

She had been dreading that text since their kiss. She was holding onto hope that it wouldn't be that text—that her prince charming would call her again to tell her how much he was in love with her. Oh well, she said, holding back her

disappointment. At least I got to be with him for a couple of hours.

She texted him back, “It was great hanging out with you! I understand, things happen. Thank you for letting me know :)” That smiley face was ironic. Her heart was doing nothing less than “:(“ after having her sliver of hope shattered.

Now it was Michael’s turn to put his heart on the line by asking out LaShana. He hadn’t felt this type of fear in a long time— not since he did his “asking 100 women out” exposure therapy.

On Monday, Michael and LaShana had a meeting. That’s when he was going to shoot his shot. Michael arrived first, and he set out to ask LaShana out to dinner as soon as she arrived. A few minutes after he made his resolution, LaShana walked in. “Hey, good morning, LaShana. How are you this great morning?”

“Doing well, how about yourself?”

“Glad to hear, doing well too! Do you want to grab dinner later today?” (This is where he was going to ask her out.)

“**NO,**” she answered in a cold, sharp tone and walked away. His heart shattered. He hadn’t felt so hurt by a rejection since middle school. Except this time, he was the one egging himself on to ask her out. The rejection resurfaced his childhood trauma.

In middle school, he had a crush on one of his classmates and told his “friends.” They told him that she also liked him and that he should tell her after school. He said that he wanted to ask her out during lunch. His friends were supporting him, telling him that she would definitely say yes.

“Hey Crystal, I think you’re really cute. Would you like to go out on a date?” he asked her confidently, because he knew she was going to say yes. To his surprise, her answer was “no,” followed by, “Haha, he actually did,” “Hahaha, he thought she actually liked him,” “Hahaha, he is so stupid,” and “He fell for it,”

from his “friends,” with his crush looking at him with a sorry expression.

All he wanted to do was cry. He knew that if he did, it would only make their laughter louder. Unfortunately, he knew he couldn't keep his tears from shedding. Fortunately for him, right before the tears started to fall someone called out to him, “Michael, let's go to lunch,” and that's how he met Chris.

Chris invited him to the table he was eating with his friends. Throughout lunch, Michael was pretty quiet, fighting his tears, feeling absolutely destroyed from what he had just gone through. He was embarrassed that his crush had said no, and he felt devastated that his friends weren't actually his real friends. However something great happened on that day.

Since that day, Chris became his first real friend and now, his best friend. Their friendship and their business deals all started because of a heartbreak. Because he met Chris, Michael had been eternally grateful for that embarrassing moment. They have been close friends since then, and Chris

became the only friend that he fully trusts in everything. That's why he didn't hesitate to go into business with him.

Although he was now an adult, almost 20 years in the future, that memory resurfaced and crushed him.

The courage that he had built up evaporated with that dinner rejection. He went back to his computer, trying to act like nothing had happened, however inside he was on the verge of tearing up. That was an embarrassing moment for him. The only time he cried over a woman was when his ex-wife cheated on him.

He wasn't even dating this woman—why did he have such strong feelings for her? It was irrational, and he had no idea what to do. He couldn't tell Chris about this. No matter how close they were, it was just too embarrassing. All she did was reject a simple dinner invitation, yet to him, it felt like waking up on a bright morning next to his wife of 20 years, the mother of his children, in a happy marriage, and then she abruptly says, “honey, I want a divorce.” That's what her simple “No” felt like.

The Night Before

The second Michael and his date's lips touched was when LaShana and her sister saw them. It was a devastating surprise. She was cheerfully walking with her sister to a restaurant that Chris had recommended.

That scene completely shattered her world. She was shocked, devastated, and on the brink of tears. After thinking that he might be actually attracted to her, she sees him kissing another woman.

"Was that Michael?" Tania asked. Once that question was asked, she knew it was real, and she could hardly hold herself back from crying when she answered, "Yes," with her voice shaking.

Tania quickly picked up on what was happening. "LaShana, let's go to Julie's house instead of dinner." LaShana quietly agreed to that suggestion by shaking her head yes. She was quiet on the way to Julie's house—at least externally. Internally, her negative self-talk wouldn't stop.

“Was he always dating someone?” “How could I be so dumb?” “I’m gonna cry, please don’t cry.” “OMG, how could I be so dumb?” “Obviously, he would want her over me.” “That’s what I get for being so dumb.” “I was really hoping he liked me.” “Why does it hurt so much?” “How can I fall for a man I’m not even dating?” “Why is she better than me?” “Why can’t he kiss me like that too?”

Once they got to Julie’s house, Tania told her that she had texted the group chat and declared an emergency “Sad Girl Club” meeting for LaShana.

RULES FOR EMERGENCY SAD GIRL CLUB MEETING

- Focus on the member(s) in need
- Listen to them
- Hug them
- Pamper them

- Vent with them
- Cry with them
- Laugh with them

How The Group Met

They met each other at a hotel management event that had over 1,000 people. They ended up eating lunch and dinner as a group throughout the event. They attended workshops together, and on their last day together, LaShana suggested they start a club where they could support each other.

LaShana's pitch was:

“We always have to be and stay positive as leaders. It's hard to be vulnerable with others because they see the success of our labor, and not the pain that comes along with the trials and tribulations that come with it. We need a place with people that understand our stress, the highs and the lows. A place where we can cry and not feel like we're being judged as weak or ungrateful. We also need a place where we can be women—talk about fashion, shopping, men, our periods, and

share a sisterhood. That's why I suggest we create the B.B.C. aka the Boss Babes Club for us boss babes!"

Everyone agreed to join the club. The club was originally online because they lived across the United States. As time went on, one by one, they started moving to New York. After only two years, all the members were now in New York. Now their meetings were in person. They had monthly meetings; however, whenever it was needed, they would all meet for an emergency "Sad Girl Meeting."

They treated it like the emergency it was. If a member was on vacation, they had to cut the vacation short to be there as support. Everyone did it for everyone else. It's a wonderful club with a strong sisterhood.

Tania was originally not a member of the club. She didn't meet them at the conference. The members of the club came to know Tania over several months of her living with LaShana. They loved her, so the members asked LaShana to invite her. That's how Tania became a member of the club.

Sad Girl Club Meeting

The first step to any Sad Girl meeting was to know what was going on. LaShana was not in the mood to share, so Tania had to do it for her. After hearing the situation, they hugged her. It was a hard place to be emotionally. Then the next step came—they had to pamper her.

“LaShana, we are taking you to the mall, and you can go crazy with the shopping. We will cover your bill,” Julie said. LaShana loved shopping! It's one of her greatest pleasures in life. Whenever she reaches a big goal, she always rewards herself with a shopping spree.

Without a word coming out of her mouth, she looked up to her sisters, and with a brooding face, covered in tears and red eyes, she shook her head yes. The only thing better than shopping was shopping with friends who loved you and were paying for you!

Tania and Julie drove the members of the BBC to the mall. After shopping, they went back to Julie's house to continue the

“Sad Girl Club Meeting.” They sat in Julie’s basement living room in a circle to share their feelings.

LaShana was the first one to vent. She was, after all, the subject of the meeting. Her venting session was all about Michael.

She summarized the story—from meeting Michael at the seminar, to seeing him again for the mentorship, to him becoming her mentor, to her feeling like he was attracted to her, to seeing him kiss another woman just a couple hours earlier. Once she got through the story, she started sobbing, and so did her fellow boss babes. They all had a similar story of a crush crushing their hearts. They all shared their stories. LaShana was surprised that they could all relate. Their shares actually made her feel better. She was not the only one to have gone through such emotional pain from someone she wasn’t even dating!

Then the next section of the meeting took place—listening to someone else’s misery. They say misery loves company, and

the “Sad Girl Club” was the only time they allowed themselves to be miserable. So they relished it.

Tania decided to vent about her troubles with her boyfriend. “I don’t know if Jean-Phillipe is the right guy for me. He is an awesome man. He is handsome, strong, intelligent, funny, kind, and has a lot of other things that make him really attractive. He is also a good boyfriend. He listens to my complaints, we don’t argue much, and when we do, it’s not a fight. It’s just the differences that we have, and we are always able to talk about them. It’s just that he does not have enough ambition, and I am worried all those other characteristics won’t be enough to help me reach my dreams. I want a man who is at least as ambitious as me, if not more ambitious than me. Actually, I want him to be more ambitious than me.”

LaShana reassured her that she was not wrong to feel that way. She understood her. Michael's ambition was one of the things that had made him so attractive to her. “Michael checks most of my boxes, just like Jean-Phillipe does for you.

You guys know how attracted I am to tall men. Michael is not that tall. I think he's 5'10." The thing is that when I visualize the 'perfect' man, only two men come to mind. One man that is perfect because I created him to be perfect, and the second man that comes to mind is Michael."

"I agree with LaShana. You should write down his good and bad qualities to quantify him and see how close he is to your perfect man! Don't forget that perfection only exists in our minds," Leslie added.

"That's a great idea! Let's make a T-chart to see," Julie said as she grabbed a piece of paper from her printer and a pen from her desk.

After a couple of minutes of jotting down his positive and negative traits, Tania had a list that contained 12 positive traits and 2 negative traits. They concluded that if he didn't want to reach the heights that she was looking to reach, it was okay—as long as he supported and cheered her on during the journey and was there to pick her up when she fell down, which

was bound to happen. After all, Oprah is a billionaire, and her husband is not.

As their “Sad Girl Emergency Meeting” was closing, they gave LaShana and Tania the prescriptions they needed.

Tania’s prescription: Have a conversation with Jean-Phillipe about her ambitions. Start the conversation with all his positive traits, explain her concerns, and conclude by telling him that she loves him and sees him in her life as her forever man.

LaShana’s prescription: Avoid spending alone time with Michael until her feelings have healed. That meant that any one-on-one meetings, like dinners, had to be avoided unless it was necessary.

The only problem was how would she be able to find a reason as to why she had to cancel. She couldn’t tell him that she had to cancel because she was heartbroken! Or that her heart couldn’t bear reliving the memory of seeing him kiss such

a beautiful woman—one that probably fit him better than she fit him—and how she was not good enough for him.

Michael's Morning

Michael was getting depressed about the entire situation. He began his morning moping around in bed. He opened his phone first thing in the morning to see if there were any texts from LaShana. There weren't any.

Checking his phone first thing in the morning was not something he did unless there was a big sales contract he was waiting for. He begrudgingly got up from his bed with the phone in his hand. As he got up, he had a rush of frustration that made him want to throw his phone across the room. His body started moving, and he started clenching his phone hard in his right hand. He knew that his emotional state was in chaos.

That “NO” he had heard the day before was still impacting him. He calmed himself down by slumping onto his living room

couch and meditated for a few minutes. He slowly got up and walked to the bathroom to pick up his toothbrush and start his morning routine.

As he began brushing his teeth, he started having negative thoughts: “She hates me now.” “What did I do wrong?” “This is all my fault.” He wanted to stop those negative thought loops, so he started thinking about work—what the goals were for the month, what needed to be done today to achieve those goals. It wasn’t working! His brain wanted to think about LaShana.

Thinking about LaShala was the last thing he wanted to do. It wasn’t productive, and it was just hurting him. Michael knew that he was human, and those things happened; it wasn’t the first time he had to deal with emotional low, it is still devastating when it happens! Fortunately, each has taught him new ways to manage life’s lows. He built himself a toolbox for dealing with the lows of life. Now, he was dealing with a new low.

He forged those tools as he learned to fire kind employees because they were consistently underperforming. He learned to deal with his own perceived and real underperformance. He learned them through conflicts with Chris or dealing with conflicts with himself. It's also how he dealt with Ivy cheating on him.

His primary tool was going to work, so he went back to work. Although his mind would wander to LaShana, he could steer it back to solving the problems that were facing him. It wasn't enough. His mind constantly went back to her. He had to try something else.

His next tool was Chris. He called him up and went to his house to spend time with him. Spending time with his best friend, his cute little toddler, and his kind wife definitely helped raise his emotional state to one that was more calm and content.

After spending time at their place, he used his next tool: hanging out with his mom. He took her out to dinner and ice cream.

Those things helped spring him back up, as he knew that dwelling on LaShana would bring nothing more than pain. As he was leaving his mom's house after dinner, he got three messages from LaShana!! When he got those notifications, his heart jumped in happiness.

Maybe she wanted to grab dinner after all, or wanted to have a meeting together. He calmed himself. "Chill out, man, don't let her control your feelings." He then opened the messages to read...

"Hey, business has been really busy lately, so I won't have a lot of time. I will unfortunately have to cancel our upcoming one-on-ones. Looking forward to when things calm down so we can continue. I will also have to unfortunately cancel our upcoming open house this Friday."

After reading that, his evening was once again enveloped in a grey cloud. He'd fucked up. The thing he was scared of most was happening. He had made her feel uncomfortable, and she was making clear that she didn't want to spend time with him.

He thought that they were having a good time and that the attraction was reciprocated, and when he finally decided to make a move, she completely shut him down. Was he imagining her attraction? The depression came right back up, with thoughts like:

“Did I make her uncomfortable?

Does she no longer want to be a part of the program?

Did I completely fuck up? I probably did.

Will we have to cancel the mentorship?

Does she hate me now?

It's all my fault...

WHAT THE FUCK DO I DO?!”

That “NO” he heard from her was getting louder whenever he replayed the memory. She was not just rejecting dinner; she was rejecting him. Now, he was also worried that he was ruining her mentorship experience with his emotions, which was what he was most scared would happen.

He knew he couldn’t keep having these emotions. He also had no idea what to do. He had already tried dating someone else, and that didn’t work. He had already gone to his friends and family for support. And now, work couldn’t distract him anymore.

He decided to meditate and think of a solution at his desk. Eureka! A possible solution surfaced.

Back in high school, he had a massive crush on his friend. Because of insecurity, he never asked her out. Those feelings wouldn’t leave, and they started eating away at him. He knew he had to express his feelings and get over it, he just didn’t want her to know—because he didn’t want what happened to him in 7th grade to happen again.

Instead of letting her know, he wrote her a love letter that he burned. He was able to express himself without putting himself in “danger” of asking her out, having her reject him, and losing her friendship (That ended up not being something he had to worry about; the next year, they ended up going to different high schools, and their relationship died.)

The letter worked, though. After all these years, that’s what he had to rely on to deal with the craziest crush he had since transforming himself with the “100 Women” experiment.

He went to his desk and grabbed a new journal. The words came effortlessly the second the pen touched the first page. After 40 minutes of furiously writing as fast as possible to get all his feelings on paper, like he was running out of time, he felt relief once he was done.

He picked up the journal, got up from his desk, and started reading his words while walking to his patio. Enthralled by his own words, he almost hit the glass sliding door to his patio. As

he read his feelings on paper out on the patio, he removed self-judgment.

He accepted that he was having irrational emotions and reminded himself that he was human and those things happen. He wasn't weak for having these feelings. He also reminded himself that he was strong enough to heal from the pain. He was strong enough for this to just be temporary pain.

He finished reading his words in one-fifth of the time it took him to write them, at least that's what it felt like. Once he was done reading, he took out his lighter, ripped the pages out of his journal, and burned them all. That night, he slept soundly.

As the mentorship continued, LaShana avoided one-on-one. That was the prescription she was given at the meeting. Michael picked up on it quickly, so he kept his distance to respect that she just wanted a mentor and not to spend time with a "creepy" man. He stopped inviting her to one-on-one events. They still had to do their bi-weekly open houses.

Although they were trying to stop their attraction, proximity is the greatest aphrodisiac, and the open houses forced them to stay in proximity. During the white noise that comes with traveling to properties, waiting for agents, and waiting on sellers, those moments of white noise were filled with personal stories. It couldn't be helped that they would get to know each other better.

LaShana learned that the confidence he had was a skill he had learned. She was the first woman he ever told about his childhood trauma. He was the first she felt protected by. They learned about each other's childhoods, it allowed them to bare their inner child to each other.

He learned just how big her heart was. The more time they spent together, the more their secret attraction grew.

Getting Ready

“Hi LaShana, we will be hosting a gala to celebrate the end of the mentorship. Since we’ve done this a few times now, we know how hard it can be to find a good dress. I have a friend, Rebecca, who is an image consultant, and she knows all the good shops around. She will be able to help you find a good dress. Are you available Tuesday or Thursday next week?” was the text she received from Michael.

“Yes, that sounds fun! I’ll be free on Thursday,” she replied. Michael then texted her back, “Fantastic, can I share your number with Rebecca?”

“Yes,” she responded.

A few minutes later, LaShana received a text from an unknown number. "Hi LaShana, this is Rebecca. Michael told me that you are free to go shopping on Thursday. We will start at the Crystal Lakes Outlets, then go to the Griff Mall, and then visit a couple of shops around town. We will meet at Crystal Lakes at 10 a.m. Is that okay with you?"

She replied, "Yes, that works for me."

LaShana drove to the first store that they would be visiting. She arrived there at 9:50 and saw a woman sitting outside in a beautiful outfit. She knew that lady must have been Rebecca. So she walked to the table and said, "Hi, are you Rebecca?" to which she replied, "Yes! You must be LaShana. You're really pretty. Michael didn't tell me that. It's going to be a lot of fun. Do you know what kind of dress you're going to wear? Do you like shopping?"

"I do like shopping, at least usually. For some reason, I always find it hard to shop for only one item, especially if it's for a dress. I don't wear those often."

“I’m glad you like shopping! I’ve had some customers who absolutely hate shopping. Why do you find it hard to shop for just one thing? Why don’t you like dresses?”

“To be honest, I love filling my cart with items when I go shopping, and when I go look for only one thing, it feels like a lot of pressure to get the perfect thing, if that makes sense. As for dresses, I used to be extremely shy when I was younger and super self-conscious. I’ve grown out of it, at least mostly, dresses still make me self-conscious. I don’t like them. I see all my flaws, and it feels like people notice me even more in them. Which sucks!”

“Okay, I understand. We will look for something that you like and that enhances your natural beauty and hides what you feel uncomfortable showing. The goal for our shopping is simple. We will be looking for three dresses that you really like. Is that cool?”

LaShana, after hearing that, replied, “Yes, that’s cool.”

After six hours of shopping, they found three beautiful dresses.

The first one was an expensive, beautiful green dress. It was LaShana's favorite dress. It was a 9 out of 10 for her until Rebecca told her that green was Michael's favorite color. Learning that her prince charming loved green elevated the dress to a 10 out of 10. The only issue was that this perfect dress was EXPENSIVE. It was \$7,997, a price tag that seemed ridiculous when she compared it to her other choices.

Her second pick was a loud red dress that would catch everyone's attention. It was also a 9 out of 10, and it was only \$250. It was 32 times less expensive than the green dress.

Her last choice was a classic black dress. It was a conservative choice, something that would allow her to blend into the audience. It was a 7/10 in her eyes, and it was a reasonable price. She had a budget of \$700 for herself, and the only dress that did not fit her budget was the green dress. It was 10 times more than what she had set out to spend.

“Are those your final picks?” Rebecca asked her.

“Yes, my favorite is the green dress, however the price tag is ridiculous. The black dress I can do without—it’s too basic. I guess I will go for the red one. It’s beautiful and it’s at a nice price point.”

So they went to the register and purchased the red dress.

As she’s being rung up, she receives a text message from her mom, “Hey, Lala, is Michael and Chris coming to the dinner?”

Her mom wanted to host a small dinner to celebrate the mentorship, however LaShana had been procrastinating on inviting her mentors. The source of her procrastination was the fear that she was going to have the man she’s supposed to be away from, going to be in her childhood home with all the people closest to her.

“Yes, just waiting for his reply. He is very busy and will get back to me as soon as he can” she lied to her mom. Right after

that lie, she ended up texting him. She couldn't bear lying to her mom after. If she did it, it was not a lie!

“Hi Michael, hope you are having a great day! My family wants to host a small dinner before the gala, and we want to invite you and Chris. Our condo is pretty small. Would you guys be interested?”

When Michael saw the text from her, he smiled, and as soon as he was done with work, he replied, “Yes, we would love to come. You know I come from poverty, right? Eating outside of a mudhouse was normal to me. You have nothing to worry about. Chris is also an easy guy. The invitation is already going to make him happy.”

She felt reassured and happy by his response.

She was afraid to invite him. She really wanted to invite him, the only thing was that she was still hurt over seeing him kiss another woman. That memory hurt too much. How could she have a crush on her mentor, a man who was dating Katherine, and a man who could have any woman in the world?

It made no sense for her to want him, and it was impossible for her to ever date him.

She wasn't sure if she could invite him. Her mom told her she had to invite him. He had been tremendously helpful; her mom was right, she had to invite him. After all, without this mentorship and his help, she wouldn't have learned all that she had, and she wouldn't have been able to adopt her new mindset. He also made her happy. He has always shown her appreciation for being herself. He respects and praises her intelligence. He has helped her grow her business. He is always a beacon of inspiration to her.

Michael knew he had to come with gifts. After several minutes of brainstorming, he figured out what he would bring as gifts. He was bringing food to the dinner. A potluck dinner was his favorite way to bond with people.

He knew exactly what kind of food he would bring. He was bringing three dishes he knew couldn't go to waste. They tasted so great that the guests would love them, and he loved the

dishes so much that he could eat all of it alone if for some reason nobody else wanted to eat.

He cooked butter chicken curry. He also brought his famous protein salad and his chocolate chip cookies. He arrived at the apartment 30 minutes early, with food in hand and Chris in tow. LaShana opened the door, and a woman was standing next to her—a woman who looked just like her.

“Hi, my name is Jude, LaShana’s mom. Thank you for coming to celebrate with us. Wow, you guys brought a lot of food. We can put the food in the kitchen. Follow me, guys.”

As they were guided to the kitchen, Michael couldn’t help looking around at the open boxes all over the floor, with decorations that should have already been set up. Jude noticed his gaze and said, “We just started decorating. After my retirement, my time management skills have drastically gone downhill. LaShana rightfully hates it. I’m sure you guys have seen how efficient she is. I used to be just like her.”

Chris replied, "That's fine. We can help set things up."

"Yes, we'd be more than happy to help," Michael added. "Oh, thank you, guys. That's a very kind offer, and I will have to accept it," Jude replied.

She really meant it. She began gesturing everywhere for Michael's help—pointing at cabinets she couldn't reach, at jars she couldn't open, and at cans that needed to be opened.

Michael couldn't see how the party could have turned fine if they didn't volunteer their help. Michael knew that he was going to be stuck in there for a while. He decided to go back to the living room to let them know.

"Hey, I'll be helping your mom for a bit. I'll come back to help you guys later." "Ugh, okay," was her response. Part of her was happy that he was helping her mom, another part of her was jealous.

They were supposed to be spending time together, so why was he spending it with her mom instead? Well, it was fine. He was a kind man who was always ready to volunteer and help.

He never complained and was happy to help them make sure everything turned out well. That was hot.

After 40 minutes of work from LaShana, Jude, Tania, Michael, and Chris, the house was finally ready for dinner. The guests arrived surprisingly on time except for LaShana's childhood friend who was 10 minutes late.

After about 30 minutes of chit-chatting, Jude called everyone to the kitchen to eat. "Guys, LaShana and I spent a lot of time cooking. Hope you guys enjoy it, and if you don't, LaShana is the one who cooked everything," she joked.

Michael thoroughly enjoyed the dishes LaShana cooked. He praised her cooking. His praises were honest as he always went for seconds. She was conquering his heart; after all, the best way to a man's heart was through his stomach.

Whenever the conversation was about her, he would constantly praise her, sharing with everyone all the positive things about her.

“LaShana has been a fantastic mentee. She is dedicated to helping us grow, and so are we. You must be proud of your daughter. She’s doing a phenomenal job!” His compliments made her blush. He had no idea how much his words were impacting her.

As the dinner was ending, LaShana thanked everyone and went around the table to hug everyone. Once she arrived in front of Michael, she was afraid. “Can I hug him? Should I not? Would it be too much? Well, if I don’t hug him, it would look very weird.” She concluded that she had to hug him.

The hug felt long, like they were lost in time with each other. They were scared that they had spent too much time hugging. How could you stop something so nice, they both thought.

Tania was the only one who really saw what was happening. She was happy for her sister. It seemed like her crush was not one-sided; Michael seemed to be attracted to her too! During dinner, he would always look at LaShana whenever

her comedian boyfriend made jokes at the dinner table. It was cute how obvious he was during dinner. Tania was happy for her sister. He was a handsome man with a nice personality.

Knock knock.

There was an unexpected guest at the front door.

“LaShana, did you invite someone else?” her mom asked.

“No, I didn’t,” LaShana replied. Then Michael turned to them and said, “Actually, I did. I invited Rebecca, my assistant, to help LaShana with her dress and makeup. I wanted it to be a surprise, if that’s okay with you guys?”

“Yeah, that’s fine,” her mom answered.

Then LaShana walked to the front door and opened it for Rebecca. In her hands, Rebecca had the green dress, and behind her, there was a Rolls-Royce. Her mom saw the Rolls-Royce and asked in surprise, “You own a Rolls-Royce?”

Rebecca answered, “No, this car belongs to Michael. He asked me to bring it.”

“Why do you have that dress with you?” LaShana asked, confused. “Well, I told Michael that you loved it and didn’t want to spend the money to buy it. He asked me to go back to the store and buy it for you, and surprise you with it,” she answered.

“Is that okay with you?” Michael asked. “OMG, thank you! That was very sweet of you guys.” “My pleasure! Glad you’re okay with it!” he replied.

Then Michael turned to Rebecca and said, “Rebecca, there has been a slight change of plans. I just got a text from the team that they will need us at the hotel. Chris and I will be going in the Prius. Can you drive LaShana, her mom, her sister, and her sister’s boyfriend with you in the Phantom?” “Yes, I can do that.”

The Gala

“**Tech & Tech**” hosted annual galas. Their goals were to celebrate their mentee, bring potential investors to both “**Tech & Tech**” and their mentee’s company, and lastly, they also used it as an opportunity to find their new mentee.

LaShana stepped out of the Rolls-Royce, with her mom and sister in the backseat. Rebecca was driving, and her sister’s boyfriend was sitting shotgun. Once they arrived at the entrance of the hotel, all the guests at the hotel were looking at them, and more specifically, at the car. It was the first time that many had seen a Rolls-Royce, and when LaShana stepped out, she felt everyone’s gaze. It was as if everyone’s

conversation switched from talking about the car to her and her dress.

Some people were loud, while most whispered to each other. That was precisely why she didn't like wearing dresses. They brought too much attention to her. Today, though, she was glad that she wore the dress and did her makeup—something she rarely did. She went all out because she wanted to look as good as possible for Michael. All the attention was evidence that she had chosen the right clothes, makeup, and hair.

Michael was shocked when he saw her. He knew that she was beautiful, he knew she dressed up and that she would look great—he still wasn't prepared. She looked even hotter than he expected. Walking down the stairs, he couldn't help noticing her chest. He was always a boobs man, and the hottest woman in the world was allowing some light to shine on the treasure he sought. After getting his gentleman's glance, he closed his eyes because the stimulation was too much for him.

“No, Michael, look her right in the eyes,” he reminded himself. And so, he did. He was nervous because he was reliving memories of the trauma that created his low self-esteem as a child.

He reminded himself that he was no longer that little kid. He was a grown man who had learned to love himself and who faced his fears, especially when the fear seemed bigger than his might. Locking eyes with a beautiful woman and asking her out was something he had done more than 100 times. This was not any different.

As she looked up the main staircase, she saw her handsome prince at the top. As they locked eyes, the gala quieted down, and it felt like all the lights were dimmed. All she could see was him, and all she wanted to hear was his voice.

Since Michael was the type of guy who made sure to look perfect for any "official" event, he made sure to get the waviest waves he could and to look as good as possible. He went to his barber first thing in the morning to ensure his lineup was as

fresh as possible for the evening. His beard was well-trimmed, and his tux was as perfect as could be, having been tailored on the day of the event to fit his body exactly as it was right then. He went through his collection of fragrances and chose his “LV” scent. All that effort was well appreciated by LaShana. She was stunned that he could look even more handsome. It almost didn’t make sense to her.

Meanwhile, a feeling of innocence, weakness, inspiration, and fear began stirring inside of Michael—a battle of emotions he wasn’t prepared to face.

He was fighting his childhood insecurity.

He was fighting fear.

He was fighting horniness.

He was fighting his heart.

He was fighting love.

He was fighting his integrity.

He was fighting his principles.

As he walked down the stairs, he reminded himself of this quote by Sean Smith: “Do it scared, do it unprepared.” Besides, fear was just an opportunity for growth.

Once he finally arrived at the bottom of the stairs, she said, “Michael, you did a great job with the event. Thank you so much for doing this,” as she walked up to hug him.

Wow, she smelled nice, he thought to himself. While hugging, he whispered in her ear that she was wearing the dress beautifully. He did that to compliment her—and as an excuse to smell her.

The inner turmoil he was going through disappeared as the hug relaxed him, and only the good feelings remained. All he had to do was live in the moment, which was exactly what he did.

LaShana broke off the hug, feeling a little drunk from being held by her prince. “Where is your date?” LaShana asked. Michael replied, “I don’t have one. Was I supposed to have one?” LaShana replied, “Not really. I just thought you would.”

“Huh? Why would you think that?” “Well, you’re you. Any woman would want you.” “Oh, got you. Yeah no date for me tonight. Went out on a date a few weeks ago. She was a nice person. There was just no chemistry. Honestly, during the date, all I could think of was how it would be more fun to go property hunting with you. I need a date to be as fun if not more fun than property hunting. ”

He did not mean for that to come out of his mouth; his heart had taken over. Once she heard that, it made her smile.

“That’s a very kind compliment, Michael.” “Well, it’s the truth. It was a very enjoyable six months with you. Gotta say, that dress looks really good on you. Glad you chose it. Otherwise, my green bow tie would be out of place.”

“Thank you,” she said, blushing. She hadn't noticed that he was wearing a bowtie that matched her dress exactly. It was the same shade of green and the same material. Michael had just dropped some bombs on her, back to back. He was not dating Katherine at all, he had just told her that their time together was his favorite, he validated her dress, and had a bow tie that matched it. It was too much for her. She couldn't handle it at the moment.

Her heart was spinning with joy. All the “signs” she saw when they were together might have been true after all. Maybe the man she saw as her prince also saw her as his princess.

The heartache that started an “Emergency Sad Girl” meeting was only a misunderstanding. It was as if she were living in a cliché rom-com. Now that the misunderstanding was cleared, she knew her night was going to go great.

There is nothing more dangerous than a sexy man dressed in a well-fitted tuxedo that complements your dress. She couldn't handle all the good news and felt like she was

going to pass out. She had to excuse herself to regain her composure and found the right excuse: “I’m going to introduce my mom and my sister to the rest of the team, okay?”

“Yeah, that’s fine,” he answered. “I have to say hi to a bunch of people, thank them for coming, and find another mentee for next year.” “Sounds good. When are we starting our speeches?” “We’re starting in 40 minutes. Let’s meet backstage in 30 minutes. Sounds good?” “Yeah, sounds good. See you soon,” she said as she smiled and hugged him again.

Michael felt lucky—this was his third hug from her today! The previous record had been 0.

“Next on stage will be Michael Kreat, our CEO. This year, he took over the WEM program, and he will be talking about the program and what it means to the community, to our company, and to him personally. Without further ado, ladies and gentlemen, please help me welcome Michael Kreat to the stage,” the event’s MC announced, followed by a loud cheer from the audience.

Michael's speech was short—only 5 minutes long. Although brief, it was enough to highlight LaShana's qualities. He did such a good job that she couldn't stop smiling during his speech, as affirmations were her love language. Her attraction to Michael kept growing.

After his speech, it was her turn. She also delivered a short speech, thanking everyone she had worked with. She also provided her testimonial of the program. She urged all the women in the audience who were interested in growing as entrepreneurs to apply for the mentorship.

A couple more speeches were given, and the MC marked the end of the main event by announcing:

“Thank you to all those who gathered and were respectful to our speakers. It can be nerve-wracking standing on stage to deliver a speech. You guys were a phenomenal audience. As a reward, the party is going to blow your minds away. You can now go to the conference hall, do

some dancing, some networking, eat some food, and most importantly, have lots of fun!”

LaShana was the first to leave the stage. She went to the conference hall to say hi to her girlfriends, her mom, and her sister. As she looked around, she couldn't help to notice that no expenses were spared for the party. LaShana was confused by Michael's duality, thinking, “How can he be so frugal in some things and so extravagant in others?” He always drives a Prius, yet owns a Rolls-Royce.

Michael was the last person to leave the stage. He had to thank all the speakers and gave the MC a goodie bag that also included a thank-you note and a tip that was 50% of the speaking fee they had already paid him. The MC almost teared up. He thanked Michael and praised him for having the best-organized event he had ever been a part of, and for being a terrific client.

“Those are very kind words. Thank you. Now let's go and have some fun,” Michael replied. qAfter he uttered the word “fun,” what flashed in his mind was dancing with LaShana. As he navigated the sea of people, he thanked each person he came in contact with. His goal, though, was to find the quickest path to LaShana.

After twelve conversations that were not with LaShana, he was finally able to spot her. He was stunned when he saw her again. His mind had been so preoccupied with making sure everything was perfect that he hadn't been able to take in her beauty earlier when they locked eyes on the stairs. So, he paused for a second to take in her beauty, then walked up to her and said, “LaShana, do you want to dance with me?”

She answered “Yes!” as quickly as humanly possible. He took her hand to guide her to the dance floor.

She looked perfect. She was wearing well-applied light makeup. It masked her small blemishes and highlighted her fine

features. Her face, personality, and body were wrapped in a beautiful, expensive green dress.

Michael was a fan of the dress the second Rebecca texted him a picture, and now that she was wearing it, he loved it even more. He patted himself on the back for buying it for her.

Once they went to the dance floor Michael once again whispered in her ear “You look fantastic in that dress. I’m glad you picked it”, she simply answered “yes”, however, what she wanted to say was, “I wore this just for you, and you complimented it twice now. I’m super happy you love it.”

Although they decided to hit the dance floors, neither of them would be what we consider natural-born dancers.

Michael wanted to be a good dancer before the party so he decided to watch a few YouTube videos. Although he made sure to pay as much attention during the videos, he forgot to do the crucial element of actually practising.

They arrived on the dance floor as soon as Usher’s “My Boo” was done and Ed Sheeran’s “Thinking Out Loud” started

playing. This was his opportunity to implement what he had learned. Unfortunately he didn't actually learn much.

The outside world saw 4 left feet dancing. Even though everyone could see the terrible dancing, they also two people having fun dancing. that were thoroughly enjoying each other's company, each other's glances, each other's touches, and each other's scent. They were totally lost in a world with only the two of them.

As the dancing went on, they felt more intoxicated with each other from touching each other and taking in each other's pheromones. It was a sensory overload for two people who used to only shake hands. Their hands were on each other's bodies, her hands explored his shoulder, and his hand discovered her lower back. They were both acutely aware of all the little touches that were happening. Each touch got them wanting more.

That was simply the result of months of sexual frustration being released.

The DJ continued playing slow songs. Which for the pair meant they could continue their foreplay. The DJ decided to play “The Time Of My Life” and a lightbulb flashed through Michael’s brain and he whispered in her ear “can I pick you up like they did in Dirty Dancing”. At first, she wanted to say no, she was terrified of falling. After feeling how big his arms and back were, she knew that he had the strength to lift her. Maybe he could lift two of her. Because her belief in his strength was stronger than her fear, she answered “yes.”

She walked backwards, and it seemed like the dance floor parted for her. Once she got far enough, she started running towards him. Somehow Michael was able to perfectly mimic the move in dirty dancing and lifted her up. Everyone’s eyes were glued to the performance. Once he lifted her, the DJ said “Wow! awesome job guys.”

It was like a dream come true moment for her, a dream she never knew that she had. That movement made the floodgates in her panties open up. Her underwear started making her feel uncomfortable with how wet she was getting.

She wanted to take them off and have Michael lick her dry. It was after all his fault that she was getting like this. Those thoughts only made her wetter, the opposite of what she wanted.

Michael's body was also reacting. Her smell, her warmth, her beauty, the passion in their touch, he couldn't help getting hard. He tried to stop it. "Mind over matter" he repeated to himself, unfortunately for him, matter had a mind of its own. His own mind was over taken by the desire to fuck LaShana! He accepted that he was a man in the presence of a beautiful woman. It was a natural reaction. The last time he had such a strong erection was back in college when he decided to take Viagra with his girlfriend.

As he brought LaShana down, LaShana felt something hard and hot brush her thigh. At first, she thought that it was his phone, seconds later she realised what it was and subconsciously bit her bottom lip.

Once her feet were touching the floor, she pressed herself against him so that she could really feel it. Her fantasies were

becoming a reality. His body was responding to her body like hers was reacting to his. She knew the attraction was mutual and with the liquid courage in her, she made her move.

She took her hand and caressed his member. This was to signal to him that she was aware and that she wanted more. He jolted a little, surprised and happy that she replied to him in such a way.

She whispered in his ear “can we go upstairs, you’ve made me super wet and I want you inside of me.” Her forwardness almost got him flustered, he calmed himself down and answered as nonchalantly as he could "let's go upstairs. I rented a room for us"

Let's Race

He takes her hand as they speed walk across the dance floor. The quickness and purpose in their walk had the people on the dancefloor thinking that something urgent was happening.

Something urgent was happening. Two people that were secretly attracted to each other were finally able to let each other know, and their secret attraction was turning to a strong lust. The lust that ignited a desire for each other, stronger than their desire to eat, to drink, or to even breathe. After all, there is nothing greater than humans falling in love with each other, nothing sweeter for the heart.

They finally reached the elevator. Before clicking the “up” button, he tells her “We have the presidential suite, it's on the 30th floor. Room 113” That sounded awesome to her. She had

never been in a “presidential suite” and was mesmerised how well he seemed to plan everything.

Once the elevator door opened, they were surprised and disappointed to see that there was an elderly couple already there. When Michael went to select floor 30, he saw that the elderly couple was going to the 29th floor. His plans of making out with LaShana in the elevator were foiled.

Michael’s erection did not go down upon seeing the couple, so LaShana had to place herself in front of him, and he took that opportunity to hug her from behind. That hug pushed his erection into her ass. She was not getting any less wet, and she hated that this was happening in front of this couple. Yet a part of her was excited by the naughtiness of being so wet in front of strangers in an enclosed public space, and how much her body wanted him.

He sparked an animalistic desire in her that she has never felt before. The desire they had for each other was an excitement that can only be compared to waking up on Christmas morning to open your gifts because you knew your

parents got you that ONE thing you have been pleading for, and worked for all year. That gift was only an elevator ride away.

Once the elevator reached their floor . They looked at the sign that said “rooms 101-113” on the right and they decided to race to see who would get to the door faster.

Michael won and opened the door. Once she runs in seconds later, he closes the door and turns to her. He pulls her close and whispers "I want you" to which she replies "You have me." Once he heard that he pulled her closer to hug her.

He hugged her like a drowning man would hug a buoyant in the middle of a storm in the ocean. Her hugs felt like heaven and he wanted it to stay in heaven forever. Meanwhile her mind couldn't think of anything beyond sex when such a sexy, tall, smart, strong man brought her to his hotel room, hugging her, kissing her, touching her, pleasing her.

At that moment nothing else mattered to her, she was on a pleasure island. In a moment of passion, Michael lifts her up

and pins her against the door, his hands on her thighs and his lips against hers.

To LaShana there's nothing hotter than being picked up. Even if she wasn't into Michael, that move would have seduced her. Since Michael already seduced her, this move was killer. She couldn't contain her panting and moaning. She felt like she was on the cusp of orgasm and in the heat of the moment, told him (something that usually takes her months) that she wanted him to ravage her.

He pauses, asks her what she means. Not wanting to bail out now, even though she's terrified of being vulnerable and facing rejection, she says "I want you to fuck me like you are raping me, im already super wet. My body can't resist even if I wanted to." Michael loved hearing those words come out of her mouth. Even though he's not into rapeplay, hearing a woman tell him how much she desired him is always a phenomenal feeling.

He decided to compromise with her. "I'll rip your dress off and I'll pin you down on the bed. I won't rape you. I'll have you

beg for me. I'll tease you until you start begging me to fuck you". In a low voice she responds "don't. Just rava-" as she's about to finish her sentence, He picks her up, puts her over his shoulder, walks over to the bed and throws her down on it.

He flips her over so that her face is against the mattress with her back and butt looking back at him. Michael places his strong hands in between the buttons of her dress, and abruptly tears off her beautiful and expensive green dress. The abruptness, the desire and the strength he showed resulted in her first orgasm of the night.

Her greatest fantasy has always been a handsome man that forces himself on her. There was no man more handsome than him. He was fulfilling her innermost desire. Michael however was surprised how quickly she came. He never had that happen before and he was an experienced man. With her back now completely exposed he slowly explores it with soft kisses. From the nape of her neck to her tailbone.

He stops right at her tailbone just to take time to take in the beauty that is her exposed butt. The one he couldn't take

his eyes off just 20 minutes ago. Now it was fully exposed in his hotel room begging him for a caress and a kiss. He starts feeling her ass, happy to feel how soft and big it is. He has never seen an ass more beautiful than her ass. He couldn't stop himself when his instinct told him to start kissing her ass. Something he has never done before, because it was also the first time he's seen such a great ass.

LaShana, still in the afterglow of her orgasm, was now wondering what he was doing to her. Why was he kissing it!? She knew she had a nice butt, yet none of her previous boyfriend ever paid attention to that part of her body. Although she found it weird, she was happy to know that Michael was getting that much pleasure from her body. Then she felt his tongue circling around her anus, and she rolled over to stop him. "Sorry I don't like that"

He answered "it's okay, I've never tried it before. Your ass is perfect, and looks delicious. Sorry, I let my intrusive thoughts win" once she heard that she blushed. She's never received

such a great and genuine compliment from anyone else before about her beauty.

Now that they were facing each other face to face, they both smiled due to how happy they were because months of sexual frustration was being released.

Michael started kissing her again, groping her breast. The second he laid eyes on her bare chest he was ecstatic. She had big nipples, something that she used to be very self conscious about. She learned to accept them. For Michael though, he was in heaven.

He once let a girlfriend go because of her nipples or lack of, and he was dreading the possibility that LaShana had the same problem. He thought she was beautiful before, now he knew that she was made perfect for him. As much as he loved groping her boobs, he really wanted to play with her nipples. He started by rubbing them with his fingers then said fuck it and just started licking and sucking. He noticed that as he sucked her nipples, she would let out quiet moans, nothing that could compare to her earlier moans.

Although he was in heaven and could spend hours playing with her nipples, he knew that she wasn't enjoying it as much as he was, and as a giver, pleasuring his partner is what is most important to him.

He freed his right hand to circle around her vulva searching for her clit. Once he found it, she started twisting her body in pleasure. Michael continued sucking her nipples while rubbing her clit. She was feeling so good, that her vagina was begging to be filled and Michael was in boobs heaven. "Michael can you put your finger in?" she said while gasping for air.

He said "no I can't, I can fuck you instead." That's what she really wanted anyways. He repositioned her in doggy position. He takes his penis and starts rubbing it against her entrance. He was surprised at how wet she was.

Her wetness made him feel like he was "that guy". He continued teasing her by rubbing his penis left, right, up down her vulva while being very careful not to let the tip in. He had to be very careful. She had a slipping hazard down there and he wanted to tease her longer.

The more he teased her, the more her vagina begged for its own pleasure. It's like her vagina took over her body when she said "can you put in already" Michael replied, "You have to beg... tell me how much you want it" since she wants to keep her dignity she said "nah it's okay" so he continues doing the same thing. This time he started seducing her with his words:

“You’re so sexy. Everything that I see in front of me is better than my imagination could come up with. Your skin is soft, warm, and smells great. Your ass is big and soft. You already knew that. Your boobs, I’m not going to lie, they are perfect. Never seen another pair of boobs this great, either in person, in porn or any type of fiction, and I’m a boobs guy. Since the day I saw your application, I have been attracted to you. Tonight is like a dream come true, and I’m here to please you like your body is pleasing me”

His little monologue made her hornier and hornier to the point that keeping her “dignity” was no longer important. She started begging him like he requested, "Please Michael, im begging you, fuck me. Fuck me hard" "thats more like it, tell me how

much you want it" "Michael I have never wanted a dick as much as yours right now. You have made me so fucking wet, I was scared that I was going to wet my dress and everyone would see."

After she begged for it, it was his turn for him to give her what she needed. He lifted her butt up and pushed her face down on the pillow without warning. That first thrust had her moan in ecstasy. Then he took it out, for what felt forever yet in reality was only seconds had her contemplating yelling "fuck you", walking away and never seeing him again. You can't tease a woman like that, she thought to herself. As soon as she was about to speak, he penetrated her. Slow at first to tease her, then he started picking up speed and grabbed her by the waist to fuck her harder and deeper.

He grabbed her like he was never going to let her go, like she was his forever. Even though he was inside of her, she still couldn't believe that Michael, the hottest guy that she has seen in her life, was not only attracted to her, he was also in bed with her. Not only is he hot, charming, kind, smart, he also knows

how to fuck her. She never had a good first sex with a partner, Michael was the exception.

It's like they were made for each other. Everything just worked. She was surprised how long the sex lasted. Although she was enjoying it, a part of her wondered if he was lasting so long because he was not into it as much as she was.

“Michael, are you enjoying this?”- She didn't want to be a wallflower so she asked him. “Yeah I'm enjoying this. I could do this for a long time.” That wasn't the answer that she was seeking.

She wanted him to tell her that he was about to cum, that he couldn't keep going any longer. She wanted him to orgasm like she had, to feel like he is enjoying it as much as she was, “Michael just use me to make yourself cum” the second those words came out of her mouth he stopped what he was doing.

He turned her body to its side, he also got on his side, wrapped his hands around her neck, gripped it with enough strength to let her know his strength can pleasure or kill her as he started fucking her.

He was doing it more ferociously than earlier. He switched from a sweet prince looking to please his woman to something completely. He was so rough with her that she felt like he became a monstrous beast that was using her body as a cum extractor as he used the force on her neck to pull her up and down his dick. After several minutes of his monstrous thrust, neck squeezing, he speeds up as he is saying “i’m about to cum” the phrase she has been looking to hear all night, “okay, cum inside of me” right when those words came out of her mouth he came. He stops, and as he rolls over to his back he transforms back into her prince charming.

“Did you enjoy it?” he asked her between his panting while laying on his back on the bed with her head on his stretched arm. “Yes, I loved it. It was the best sex I have ever had.”

The greatest compliment he could have received. Although he was exhausted, her words energised him and he said “give me a couple minutes and we can do it again” “Okay!” she replied cheerfully and excitedly. Then they continued fucking each other until they fell asleep.

Will you...

In the afterglow of their orgasms,

LaShana placed her head on his shoulder, holding his hand basking in joy. There was a comfortable silence between them for a couple minutes, until Michael broke the silence “Do you like romance?” “What woman is not into romance” she replied. “Okay fair enough, meant something more specific. Are you into romantic gestures?” he replied.

“What do you mean by romantic gestures? Receiving flowers? Yes. Cooking for my man? Yes. Or do you mean something else?” she asked.

“I mean are you into big romantic gestures? Like public marriage proposals or your boyfriend bringing you flowers to your job or having someone sing to you in public.” She took a minute to think then replied “Yes, in highschool I used to love watching prom proposals, wedding proposals and things like

that. They were super cute, and I wanted some guy, any guy haha to do it my senior year. Unfortunately it never happened. I don't understand when women say they don't like it. It's great having a man show love publicly. Makes my heart flutter.”

“Ah got you. In highschool I wanted to do that too, sadly at the time I wasn't confident and thought no girl was attracted to me.” “That's crazy that you thought that! I'm sure there were multiple girls who were waiting for you to ask them like I would have.” he smiled and replied, “You're right. Younger me had a lot of self-esteem issues to work on. Which he did, now he's in bed with the most beautiful woman he has seen in his life.” That line made her blush.

Meanwhile, gears started running through Michael's mind about the answers she gave. This meant that she would take it well if he asked her out publicly. He always wanted to ask out a woman in public. Now he was brainstorming ideas as to how we would do it .

Ring Ring Ring His alarm interrupted his brainstorming session. This was the alarm he set up the night before to

remind him of the brunch they were hosting. It was part two of their celebration.

“I’m going to shower first, I will be quick and will head down first to make sure everything is set up” he told LaShana as he rolled over to turn off his alarm. While he was showering, he continued his brainstorming. Thinking of how he would ask her out during the speech that he was to deliver at brunch:

“Should I bring flowers? Do I start the speech by asking her out, or do I end the speech by asking her out? How should I ask her out? Should I ask her to be my girlfriend, or should I ask her out on a date? Well we already spent a lot of time together, and we just had sex last night and again this morning, maybe I can ask her to be my girlfriend. Should I ask her to marry me? Whoa that’s way too early buddy, pump the brakes. Okay i’ll ask her to be my girlfriend”

Then he hears a knock at the bathroom door “Michael we don’t have that much time, can you hurry please?” she asked “Yes ma’am” he answered. He had to stop daydreaming to

make sure that they got ready on time, being late is something he hated. Once he was done, he rushed downstairs.

At exactly 11:00 the brunch started. Everyone was sitting at their seats. LaShana was sitting in the first row. Lucky him! In less than 10 minutes he had to deliver his speech.

In the past few months he practised to deliver one speech, however this morning he decided he was going to give two. The one he practised and an impromptu speech asking out LaShana in front of everyone. Fear started festering in his mind.

“What if she says no. I’m pretty sure she will yes, there’s still like a 10% chance she says no. Maybe even a 40% chance of a no. What if people think that the speech is bad? What if people laugh at what I say? What if she laughs at it? Well it’s Okay. The worst thing that could happen is not really that bad. I have to think positive. It’s going to go well. Everyone is going to enjoy it. She is going to say Yes. This is the start of a beautiful relationship. We are going to have a great life together.

She and I are happy. Everything is going to go better than expected”.

What started as a fear loop became a chant of positive affirmations. As Michael heads to the stage he affirms to himself “everything is going to work out.”

His first speech is all about business. He goes over their experience with creating the retail stores. How they have increased their business, and also the lessons they learned. He concluded the first part of his speech with “Thank you guys for listening before I leave the stage. There's something I have always dreamed of doing, is that okay with you guys? It's a short speech, for all those that are okay with it, raise your hand”. He looked around the audience and saw most of their hands were raised. He had permission to start his second speech.

“ You guys may not believe this, I am a massive fan of love. Love is one of the greatest feelings in the world.

There's nothing that I enjoy more than the love of friends,

family, and the love between our business and our customers. The genuine thanks we receive from our customers is the biggest motivation to keep going when things get difficult, and sometimes things can get really difficult in business. Thank you to my family and all my friends that are always there to give me love. Without you, I wouldn't be able to deal with the downs of life and with whom I can also share the highs of life. My material success would mean almost nothing if there was nobody to share it. There's another love that I love, and it's the romantic kind. Growing up while in high school I would binge watch wedding proposals and promposals looking forward to one day to do the same to a special woman. Today my heart tells me that I have met that woman. That woman is actually in this room. She is beautiful inside and out, without exaggeration, she's the most beautiful woman I have seen in all of my travels, and I spent my late 20s travelling the world. All the moments we have shared together have been phenomenal. We could spend an

entire lifetime together and it would still feel like the time we spent together was too short. There was an evening where we were speaking about the future. What would marriage be like, having a family and building a business. It was one of the best conversations that I had, and there's something I wasn't able to say then that I will say now, you are the woman I see myself building a successful marriage, family and business. Yes, it's extremely early to talk about a future together. My heart knows that it wants you and that you are special, and my brain knows that we are compatible with our values and our goals. Although you are the woman that will become my wife, today I'm just asking you to be my girlfriend. LaShana, will you be my girlfriend?"

His question was almost drowned out by the excitement of the crowd. For the second time this weekend she felt everyone's eyes on her. She was feeling flustered, nervous, and extremely happy at the same time. It finally happened, she was finally being asked out in public and she was asked out by

a man that she thought only existed in romance novels. It felt like her entire weekend was a perfect romance fairytale. The kind of cliché romance story she would read in high school.

While still sitting stunned in her chair, Chris came to her and handed her flowers with a note that said "will u be my gf" like a middle school love note. That made her giggle and relieved her of all her nervousness. Chris then handed her a microphone so that she could answer the question. She took the microphone in her hands, all eyes watching and all ears listening, and replied "yes Michael, I will be your girlfriend."

That's how their 60 years of marriage started...